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# L O Y A L.

# L O Y A L.

## A Novel.

"Loyal je serai durant ma vie."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1872.

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# LOYAL.

## CHAPTER I.

THE next day Guy Lawrence might have been seen wandering about town like an uneasy spirit, seeking rest and finding none. He was in a state of mind which made it impossible for him to be quiet; and yet, though he had many things to do, he could not make up his mind to do any of them; and so wandered aimlessly about the streets and the parks, now and then picking up an old acquaintance and stopping to exchange a few words, and then hurrying away as if he had some important business on hand, but never doing it.

The fact was, he could not settle to anything until he had seen Bertie and learnt from him how much truth there was in this report concerning him and an actress. That there was some, Guy could not doubt, for

Bentham had seemed so assured on the subject, and he would not have repeated an idle and vague rumour with so much positiveness of conviction.

Moreover Guy was suffering the tortures of suspense and anxiety about another matter, which was necessarily and inextricably interwoven with this.

In all this time, nearly two years since the death of his mother, he had not got over his love for Kitty Lorton; and now he was absolutely ignorant of what had become of her—where she was, or what she was doing.

He had never positively heard that the engagement between her and Bertie had come to an end, but he surmised that it was so. In reply to the few questions which he had asked of Bertie in his letters from abroad—and Guy's very anxiety had made him shy of asking many—he had merely learnt that on the death of her father she had gone to stay with Mrs. Hoare, and was well taken care of. He had searched in vain for her through the rooms, and felt certain that she had not been there on the previous evening; but something, some hesitation which was usually very foreign to Guy Lawrence, had held him back from

asking his cousin anything about her. He thought he would wait and ask Bertie, but then the news which he had heard from Bentham had driven, for the moment, all other thoughts out of his head.

His intense anxiety for Bertie was paramount even over his love. Only in the quiet of the night, when he thought of it all, did he remember what this rumour involved. Surely it was not possible that Bertie should make his admiration and infatuation for an actress so prominent that it had become the talk of the town, if he had still been engaged to this girl? No, he could not believe it. Bertie might be reckless and weak—never so dishonourable as this. The engagement between them must have been broken, and it had probably been Kitty's own doing. She had done it in her pride, as she said she would. She had thrown away her only hope of a future home, and gone out to fight her own way in a world which would be too harsh and pitiless for her—poor little innocent, delicate girl! It made Guy Lawrence's heart sore to think of her as she might be at this moment: penniless, homeless, desolate, earning perhaps a bare subsistence by weary

drudgery, while he had so much of this world's goods and could not give her any—could not give one iota out of his abundance to her, who had nothing.

The mere thought that she was possibly free, that the barrier which existed between himself and her was broken down, set Guy Lawrence's brain on fire with the old mad, passionate love—the longing to be near her, to tell her all the truth, to tell her how his heart had ached for her all these weary months; how it had almost killed him to give her up to his brother; how nearly, on that April morning more than a year ago, he had broken through the silence to which he felt himself bound by every tie of duty and honour, and told everything: all the love and all the sorrow which had robbed his life of its happiness, and made it only a heavy burthen that must be borne. To be able to pour out his very soul in passionate pleadings for her forgiveness; to be able to confess the wrong he had done her in not telling her of his love long ago; to be able to tell her why he had kept silence, and how bitterly he had repented it ever since.

It could not be that this happiness was to be granted to him after all? Guy was

something of a fatalist, and it seemed impossible to him to believe that his lot, which had been cast in shady places, would ever change; he did not dare hope that the sunlight which had so long been shut out from his heart and from his life, would ever burst through the darkness and shed brightness over the future.

He would not delude himself with hopes which would never be realized. It was more than possible that the engagement between his brother and Kitty Lorton still existed—that Bertie, though he had not been able to resist the fascinations of this actress, had only yielded her a passing admiration which had been greatly exaggerated by the *on dits* of the world, but had never reached Kitty Lorton's ears. It might be that she was not earning her living at all by the weary toils of a governess, but was staying with friends until the time of her marriage.

Ah! the pang which shot through Guy's heart at that thought showed him that these new-born hopes had taken deeper root than he imagined.

And then again, even if she were free, alone in the world and destitute of all other friends, could he after all that had passed

dare to address her with words of love? Remembering all, would she not take them only as a fresh insult, and repel them with the scorn and anger which she had shown to him ever since she had first believed him to be dishonourable and treacherous? would she not only treat him with disdain, and refuse to believe in a love which had made her a secondary consideration, and sacrificed her to the good of another? Racked and tormented by these thoughts, it was little wonder that Guy Lawrence could not rest. One minute he resolved to call on Mrs. Hoare and ask of her the tidings which he longed, yet dreaded to hear; the next, he thought he would rather learn them in any other way—for she, with her sharp woman's eyes and womanly instinct, might guess his secret and read his anxiety in his looks.

That June day, with its cloudless sky and never wearying sunshine, seemed as if it would never have an end, and Guy Lawrence found that there is nothing so tiring as aimless wanderings, nothing so tedious as watching for the hours to pass.

He made up his mind that there could not be any better opportunity for asking and hearing all the truth from Bertie than

when he was dining with him, tête-à-tête. He would try to gain Bertie's confidence. What had he to fear in speaking honestly to him—had he ever tried to do anything but help him in all his scrapes? And he was ready to help him out of this last one—ay, and to fight his battles for him, again and again, as often as he needed help.

It was a great disappointment to Guy when he arrived in Jermyn Street to find that Leath had returned with Bertie from the pigeon-shooting and was going to stay to dinner. He arrived punctually at half-past six, and Bertie had not quite finished dressing, but sung out from an adjoining room that he "would be ready in no time." So Guy had to amuse himself with taking a survey of the luxurious room and the small specimen of humanity who lay stretched on a couch in the last stage of exhaustion.

"Awful work, pigeon-shooting! so tiring, you know, lifting the gun and standing about, and all that. 'Pon my word, a few days of it would knock me up completely."

"You appear to be rather done up," remarked Guy, with a slight tinge of sarcasm in the way in which he surveyed the weak little figure before him.

"Eh? yes—I'm not so strong as you," with a survey of Lawrence's physical dimensions through his eye-glass. "Couldn't have stayed as you did that day at Aylesbury. By Jove! that was a plucky thing. I say, is your arm—the one that got smashed, you know—all right?"

"It's a little stiff—always will be. I can only bend it very slowly," answered Guy.

"It's your pistol arm, isn't it," asked Leath.

"Yes, but that doesn't much signify, as I seldom or never fire one, and am not thinking of fighting a duel."

And then the door opened, and Bertie and Bob Bentham entered at the same minute. Guy thought to himself that it was evident Bertie did not care for a tête-à-tête with him, and had taken care to provide against it. He greeted his brother cordially, and they very soon sat down to a dinner which was served in first-rate style.

The conversation was not overflowing with brilliancy or bon-mots, but that was not to be expected; and Guy finding that in much of the small talk he could take no share, because he was unacquainted with

the people and things, the town-gossip and *esclandres*, which were the chosen topics, lapsed now and then into silence, and took note of things around him.

The room in which they sat very much resembled the one which Bertie had furnished in accordance with his own taste at Oxford. Very many of the same things were there, though the whole effect was even more costly, and spoke even more of unsparing expense than it had done before.

But there was one striking difference: all the gorgeously coloured sketches of ballet-girls were gone, and over the chimney-piece, in the place of honour, hung the portrait of a woman.

It was a head, life-size—an exquisitely painted water-colour. Guy Lawrence could not see it well without slightly turning his head, and he did not care to have his notice of the picture observed and commented upon, for he felt he could not bring himself to ask whose it was, or to admire the talent of the artist, in the present company.

He felt that that face which smiled down on him with its exquisite, wonderful beauty, was the face of the woman who had singled

out his brother to be the victim of her fascinations. He gave one upward glance at it, and the great slumbrous eyes seemed fixed on him with an evil light lurking under their heavy lids. He cursed the perfection of beauty which the picture revealed, and tried to forget it in the enjoyment of his dinner, and to get up some interest in the town talk that was going on around him; but though he withdrew his eyes, he could not withdraw his thoughts from the pictured loveliness of that woman's face. It seemed to haunt him with a vague remembrance, like the memory of a bygone dream. He could not forget it, and he felt that he was growing every moment more unsociable and self-engrossed, and tried, not very successfully, to rouse himself.

"I hope you'll come with me to the theatre, if you've nothing better to do," said Bertie, as the dinner came to a close, and they were lighting up and sipping their café noir. There was a slight hesitation in his manner, which Guy construed into a desire that the invitation, which was almost unavoidably given, would be refused, but for reasons of his own he resolved to accept.

"Thank you, Bertie, it's a long time since I've been inside a theatre. I suppose I must try and do some of the London gaieties, unless I mean to be taken for a regular savage."

"Things are rather changed since you were here, eh?" asked Bentham.

"It is almost incredible how a few years will change all the people and streets in London. I scarcely saw one of the faces which used to be as familiar to me as my own when I spent a season in town some three or four years back."

"Haven't you been in London since then?"

"I have only passed through — sometimes spent a day or two *en passant*."

"There's always a lot of cads who suddenly appear no one knows whence. Make a great flare-up with their carriages and horses, opera-boxes, and powdered footmen, and as suddenly disappear—goodness knows where—and sink into utter oblivion. Cads who speculate, you know—make fortunes by some species of swindling, and then lose them again," soliloquized Bertie.

"People who are not cads manage to get through the money somehow," drawled Leath.

Bertie laughed.

"Does it hit home, Leath?"

"Well," was the response, "any way it's a consolation to know that we're both in the same box."

Bertie turned uneasily; the conversation was drifting unpleasantly into personalities.

"I almost think we had better be going," he said, looking at the clock; "Guy, my brougham's at the door. Will you and Bentham go in it? and Leath and I will follow in a Hansom."

"I ordered my cab round here," said Leath.

"All right; after you, Guy," and Lawrence and Bentham went down the stairs, the former half angry at Bertie's ingenuity in avoiding him, half sorrowful at the thought that the brother whom he had cared for even too well should distrust him as he did.

Bertie turned when they had left the room, and hastily snatching up an exquisite bouquet of the most delicate rosebuds interspersed with maidenhair ferns, which lay on a side table, followed Leath into his cab.

For a few moments there was silence between the two in the brougham.

"I saw you looking at that picture. It is her portrait," said Bentham, laconically, after they had proceeded some little distance.

"Is it like her?"

"No, it's not. It's merely the artist's own idea of a beautiful woman. It's not the woman herself. I wonder that Bertie can hang it on his walls. I heard him say once that it has a look of her about the eyes; and it has, but there the resemblance ends."

"It is marvellously beautiful," pondered Guy.

"I told you she was a stunner," said Bentham. "If you're going to try and get the better of her, you wont win through your adversary's weakness, I warn you, Lawrence. She beats her picture hollow. She has none of that spirituelle, ethereal beauty that the artist has endowed her with, but for animal, physical beauty, you might search the world through and not find her match."

Guy sighed.

"If I tried to save Bertie from marrying

her, it would be an unequal combat, with all the power on one side," he said at length.

And then they reached the theatre, and they all entered the box—the next but one to the stage on the lower tier—together.

The *lever-du-rideau* was over, the drop-scene was down, and the orchestra were playing their best.

Bertie insisted on Guy taking a front seat, and seemed himself to prefer a chair placed in the back of the box and in the shadow of the curtain.

The house was crammed to suffocation, and the people were eagerly waiting for the beginning of the play and the appearance of the famous Estelle—the woman who by the display of her wonderful beauty, as much as by her singing and dancing—both far beyond the average—had made the new piece an unheard-of success, and brought down thunders of applause and showers of bouquets every night of her life, on her own triumphant head.

Guy waited almost as impatiently as the rest of the audience for her coming.

He glanced at Bertie, whose flushed cheeks and restless movements belied his

feigned sleepiness, and then his eyes fell on the bouquet.

"What a gorgeous posy! Who's to be honoured with that?" he said, with a smile. "I pity the fair recipient—it's so big it will almost crush her, with its weight of honour."

"I generally bring one to shy at the prettiest girl I see," answered Bertie.

"I don't think there's generally much doubt as to who will have it, Bertie," said Bentham.

"Oh! Estelle of course," responded Bertie, with would-be carelessness; "every one throws her a bouquet—it's the thing to do, you know."

"Wonder she isn't like the fellow—you remember—the Roman fellow who was smothered by the shower of cloaks," said Leath, with a feeble reminiscence of some old story learnt long ago in the days when he was crammed.

"Eh? what?" said Bentham. "No; don't know any Roman fellows—know plenty of Jews, I'm sorry to say."

"There's an awful Jew in that stage-box opposite," said Leath; "fingers blazing with diamonds, and all that sort of thing;

he's after Estelle—goes there every night, and ogles her. Ugh! isn't he a beast, with his nose and his greasy beard? I couldn't touch him with a pair of tongs."

"I shouldn't mind touching some of his shekels of gold, though," said Bertie.

"Who is he?" asked Guy.

"Don't you know?" said Bentham. "What a thing it is to be a Crœsus. That's Leoni, the money-lender."

And then the music changed, and the curtain rose.

The scene was a fair, supposed to be held near a camp, and began of course with a dance, chiefly composed of girls in village dresses of some bygone era, and soldiers in a variety of not very military costumes.

It was well got up, and through the brilliancy of the dresses and the vivacity and elegance of the dance, had a wonderful effect. There were many songs, and lastly came one describing the beauty and wonderful powers of a foreign woman who had suddenly appeared in the camp; who, from her fatal powers of attraction, and from the magical manner in which she bewitched all

who beheld her, had obtained the name of "La Belle Sorcière."

As the women listened to the tale, some shivering with fear, some possessed with a wild curiosity, the daylight slowly faded. The gay-coloured lamps that hung on the branches of the trees and in the booths and stalls were lighted, and shed a lurid glare over the stage.

The singer ceased, and a hush of fear fell on those who had listened: the girls clung closer to their sweethearts, as if by their touch they would charm away the spell, and the men hung tenderly over them; when suddenly into their very midst sprang a woman, so wonderfully, strangely beautiful that they all shrank away with cries of "witch," "enchantress," "sorceress," and left her standing alone, as in a magic circle.

She stood there a moment, perfectly motionless, her eyes fixed on the ground. The red light fell on a face of marvellous beauty, on perfectly moulded, round, white limbs—revealed rather than hidden by the clouds of diaphanous drapery—on one shapely arm supporting a glittering tambourine.

And Guy Lawrence looking at her, knew

her — knew that he looked on Celia Ragoni.

The music had sunk to a low tremolo, the voices that hissed at her had been hushed, when the stillness which enthralled the audience was suddenly broken; she gave a weird cry, flung her arms into the air, and sprang into a wild dance.

No wonder the peasants and soldiers held their breath, and watched her entranced; no wonder they shrank away, almost in terror, from the beautiful witch, who twisted and wreathed her fair white form in all the contortions of her strange, unearthly dance.

Slowly the spell began to work. One by one the men dropped their arms from where they had rested round some girlish waist or neck; little by little, slowly, unwillingly, as if drawn by some fatal magnetism which was beyond their power to resist, they drew nearer to the circle where she danced. And she danced on, throwing her smiles and glances with unerring precision, first on one, then on another, till all had fallen captive to her charms. Some threw themselves prone on the ground,

some knelt at her feet, some touched the hem of her dress with worshipping fingers, others kissed the green sward where she had danced, and the women wailed and wept and stormed and raved in vain. "La Belle Sorcière" had woven her magic spells in every heart, set every brain on fire with her beauty. And then she paused, shot one triumphant glance over the scene, and the curtain fell.

The shouts and thunders of applause which broke from the assembled people, the cries and calls for "Estelle!" brought up the curtain once again.

The beautiful dancer came forward with a beaming smile, and for the first time glanced round the house.

Her eyes fell on the box where the brothers were seated—they rested one moment on Guy Lawrence's face: she gave a low cry, her face turned ghastly white, and she tottered as if she would have fallen, had not one of the actors rushed forward to support her.

Bertie started up with a cry which echoed hers, but the curtain fell and hid her from sight. He seemed as if in his excitement he would almost have called out

to her from the box. Guy pushed him back by main force.

"She has bewitched you indeed if she can make you forget where you are," he muttered.

They stood and glared at each other, Guy with a face almost as white as his brother's.

"What was the matter with her?" asked Bertie, wildly.

"She's only overdone—that infernal dancing," said Bentham, and they all turned again towards the stage.

There was a sudden hush. The manager had come before the lights, and was explaining that Mademoiselle Estelle had suffered from a slight faintness, brought on by the heat of the weather and the exertion of dancing, but she was now perfectly recovered, and the piece would proceed. The music struck up, the house subsided into tranquillity, but Guy Lawrence looking round found that Bertie had left the box.

"Gone behind, to inquire after the fair creature, I suppose," said Bentham, in answer to Guy's look.

"New sensation this," drawled Leath. "Shouldn't wonder if she did it for effect."

"It's not very wonderful she should knock up," observed Guy, feeling that he must say something. "She dances with more power, more force, than any woman I have ever seen."

"She's more like a witch than a woman," muttered Bentham; "piece suits her to a T; was written for her—there's nothing in it really but the situations—and the music is good. Here's Bertie! Where have you been, young 'un? Is Estelle in form again?"

"All right, I believe," was the answer; but it was easy to guess from the ominous cloud which had gathered on Bertie's face that he was not much better informed on the subject than when he had left the box.

A constrained silence fell on them all. Guy sat with his face resting on one hand and turned towards the house. His thoughts were in the wildest confusion; he felt as if he must be dreaming—that it could not be possible that Celia Ragoni, the girl who had so long lived on his charity, and Estelle, the woman who held Bertie in her toils, were one and the same. Yet undoubtedly it was she. The same graceful, beautiful woman who had stood before him in her flowing robes in La-

burnum Villa, had just now danced in semi-nudity on a public stage.

Surely if she had known that Bertie was his brother—and she must have known it—she might have spared him, if it were only out of gratitude to the man who had saved her in her childhood.

But then Guy remembered that the gratitude of which Celia had so much boasted, had all turned to anger when he refused to help her to go on the stage. He remembered how she had deceived him and led him in her letters to believe that she was still at the house where he had placed her. The very money which he had sent so regularly for her support had probably been used by her as a means of advancing her ambition; perhaps her encouragement of Bertie had been a species of the same perverseness, an intentional display of power to one who had resisted and opposed her. Guy's thoughts, which were not of the pleasantest, were broken short by the re-rising of the curtain.

In this scene the soldiers are supposed to be stationed in a town which is besieged. "La Belle Sorcière," though she is an inmate of this town, has a lover who is a young

officer in the enemy's camp, to whom she pays stolen visits, disguised as a page. The manner in which she obtains ingress and egress to and from the beleaguered town, she preserves a secret even from the man whom she visits. She will not betray her friends, and she will not desert them in their time of need. She plays the part of ministering angel to the sick and wounded among the soldiers, who half worship her, half fear her as some unearthly being, and she steals away from them to brief sweet interviews with the man whom she adores with all the passionate fervour of her nature.

Sitting in his tent, the proportions of her perfect figure clearly defined in her page's dress, her head resting on his breast, her face softened into tenderness, Estelle looked yet more beautiful than she had done before.

And then she sang a passionate love-song, and her splendid voice wailed and thrilled through every heart. So sweet was the voice that Guy, taking a swift glance at his brother, could scarcely feel surprised at the intensity of emotion betrayed in his face.

There is a call to arms! Estelle helps with trembling fingers to buckle on her lover's armour, and then she bids him adieu, and the curtain falls as they are standing together in a pose, very much resembling the attitude that Millais has for ever made famous in his beautiful picture of the Huguenots. Nothing can be more touching in its exquisite tenderness than the face which "La Belle Sorcière" raises to her lover's—the face which had so lately flashed with wild excitement, with reckless gaiety.

After that there were various interludes, by-plays which had no interest for Guy, because Estelle took no prominent part in the performance.

There is a jealous lover who, maddened by the charms of Estelle and hatred against his rival, resolves to betray them both. And then there comes a scene in which Fernande, the young officer, is arrested on the charge of harbouring a spy, who in the dress of a page passes backwards and forwards between his tent and the besieged town. He is tried and condemned to die. Overcome by the fear of death and by the entreaties of his friends, he pleads for life. He avers that his visitor is a woman, a

sorceress, who has bewitched him, and that he is an unwilling victim to her fatal arts—he is under a spell, which he has no power to break.

Those who judge him are willing to believe him, for he is a favourite amongst them, and their belief in and dread of witchcraft make them too ready to hear him. They watch for "La Belle Sorcière," and capture her when she comes to pay a visit to her lover. She is dragged before her judges and learns of what she is accused, and who is her accuser.

Her agony, her horror, her despair at the discovery of Fernande's perfidy are almost terrible to witness. It is hard to remember they are only acted—they are so real. She is condemned to be burnt as a witch: they know no pity for her youth, they turn away their eyes lest they should be bewitched by her beauty. She must die—a shameful, horrible death.

Again, in another scene, she is confronted with her betrayer, and in her fury and scorn, her sudden meltings into pitying tenderness and passionate love, Estelle attains almost to the perfection of dramatic art.

Finally she is dragged on the stage amid the crowd of enraged soldiers, through the hissing and cursing of an infuriated mob—to die. A tattered serge dress is tied round her waist by a rope, her luxuriant hair streams over her bare shoulders, her beautiful face, white as marble, is distorted with agony, as they tie the rough cords round her wrists. She gives a wild cry, she looks around her, and prays for mercy—and her voice and her words are so strangely pathetic that there is a hush even among her furious accusers. Fernande, who has been hidden among the crowd, bursts through the people, and makes his way to the front of the stage; he throws himself at her feet and confesses all—his cowardice, his treachery, and his dishonour. He addresses the assembled multitude, and swears by Heaven that she is no witch—only a beautiful woman whom he has loved, and prays that he may die in her stead.

He prays in vain. They cry that she has bewitched him again, that he is under the influence of the evil eye, that he knows not what he says. They try to drag him from her, but he clings to her with the strength of despair. She lies in his arms.

She looks up into his face with ineffable tenderness; she murmurs that she forgives him, that she is happy to die so. The executioners tear them apart. But she has swooned, she lies on the ground in a dead faint. Fernande throws himself by her, and raises her head. She looks once in his face, and—dies.

* * * * *

"Best thing she could do," growled Guy. "They couldn't burn her on the stage."

"She's a devilish good actress," said Bentham. Ay—so it seemed. The cries that broke from the audience would have gladdened the ears of the greatest artiste that ever lived, and they brought triumph to the heart of Celia Ragoni—the passionate triumph which gleamed from her eyes as she fixed one long look on Guy Lawrence's face, when she made her final curtsey and retired.

They all strolled together from the box, and waited at the door for the carriages.

Bertie turned to Guy.

"Good night, Guy! You and Bentham can have the brougham to take you where you please. I'm going to call on a friend,

and then I shall look in at the Club. I shall see you to-morrow, I suppose?"

Guy mechanically held out his hand, and with a brief "good night" to the other men, Bertie disappeared.

Bentham and Guy drove almost in silence to Long's Hotel; and the latter refusing an invitation to go to the Club, watched the brougham drive away.

He stood at the door for a few moments, lighting a cigar, and then turned his face towards the Park and walked slowly on.

Of what use to try and rest? He felt, in the terrible whirl of conflicting thoughts, as if sleep would never visit his eyes again.

It was little wonder, considering all the events of these two days, that it seemed to him as if he were hunted and pursued by a terrible fatality.

The good that he would have done had all turned to such terrible evil. But for him, and his rash charity, this woman, Celia Ragoni, would never have been here to cross Bertie's path and ruin every hope of his future life. But for the mad sacrifice of his own love to Bertie's, Kitty Lorton would not be deserted and homeless now.

Yet surely in these two actions of his life he had been guided by no other motive than the desire to do good, and benefit others even at his own cost. How was it that he had failed? How was it that life was all such a tremendous and egregious mistake?

Looking up into the clear evening sky, where the pale stars shone dimly through the semi-darkness, Guy Lawrence felt that though the world was fair enough, yet none of its fairness was for him.

The great and wonderful gift of existence had not been bestowed upon him for the enjoyment he might find therein.

Love and happiness—the tempting fruit which had hung before his eyes—had at the first touch turned to deadest ashes within his hand. The flowers which had seemed to bloom so brightly in the distance, when plucked, had he not found them to be steeped in the poison of bitterness and despair?

To him had been given intense powers of loving, and that rare quality—faithfulness; but it had been his fate since earliest childhood to see the love which should have been his, given to another, and his

devotion and self-sacrifice had only brought evil on those whom he would have served.

What wonder that he was ready to cry out, in the very bitterness of his heart, "Why was I born?"—for what end, for what purpose, was I endowed with this vitality which I cannot throw away, and which I cannot use with any benefit to myself or others.

Such a time came to him as probably comes to all of us, at some period when the very shadow of despair is over us, when it is vain to struggle against the depression which weighs us down even to the ground, when through an accumulation of adverse circumstances it seems impossible that the light of hope can ever break through the blackness of darkness that is over all things.

Guy Lawrence threw himself down on a seat in the now deserted Park, and sitting there with folded arms and his head sunk on his breast, gave himself up to his thoughts.

For a long while he did not attempt to fight against the despair which had overtaken him. When he had first heard that Bertie, foolish and boy-like, had become the

captive of a celebrated actress, it had seemed to Guy to be bad enough; but now that he knew who the actress was, knew all the hardness of her ambitious and grasping nature, he felt how vain it was to hope that she would give up any smallest part of the triumph she had won. He felt how useless it would be for him to attempt to combat the influence which a woman clever and beautiful as Celia Ragoni would have gained over Bertie Deverell.

And then he had failed so signally hitherto in all that he had attempted, that he had not the will to try any more.

But other thoughts came after awhile. Guy Lawrence was not the man to give in, even though the case seemed desperate. He would not rest until he had done something; he would go to Bertie and learn the worst from him, learn how far he had given his honour into her keeping, and then speak to him, tell him all he knew of this woman—Celia Ragoni, Estelle, or whatever she chose to call herself.

No false glamour should rest over her antecedents—Bertie should know her for just what she was; and surely it would be hard if he who had thought so much, cared

so much for this young brother, should have no influence, no power over him! And if he failed with Bertie, Guy Lawrence knew that there remained yet another chance—though it was but a slender thread on which to hang a hope—the possibility that Celia Ragoni might recognise his claim to ask a favour of her—that some small remembrance of the gratitude of which she had once spoken in such strong words, might induce her to spare his brother.

It was strange with what a repugnance Guy Lawrence thought of this woman in whose life he had once so much interested himself, how he shrank from ever seeing her again; but he was resolved to fight the battle even unto the end, and not to let slip the smallest chance of victory.

When he rose from the seat and looked at his watch, he found that he had been there an hour. Bertie would probably not have returned yet from the Club; should he go to Jermyn Street and wait for him there? If he missed this opportunity of speaking to him, it might be long before he found another, for he knew well that Bertie had the will to avoid him, and would, if he

could. Moreover the case was desperate. Guy had read in his brother's face that evening how far things had gone with him, and felt certain that his honour would soon be pledged, if it was not already. He must speak to him ere it was too late. And he turned his face resolutely forwards, determined to do his best, though he had little hope of success.

## CHAPTER II.

GUY LAWRENCE had waited some time in Bertie's room. The daylight was shining brightly through the open window, for he had drawn up the blind to admit every breath of air that was stirring.

It was a close, sultry June night, and the flare of the gaslights made the room almost unbearable, and shone with a lurid glare on the fair woman's face that hung on the walls.

Guy rose to go. It was useless to wait for Bertie any longer. If he came now he would not probably be in the mood to listen to advice. Guy remembered this now. His anger and impatience had somewhat cooled down after this long waiting, and he rose, tired and weary with his sad vigil, to seek the rest he began so much to need. But he met Bertie on the threshold.

"Hullo, Guy! what in the name of Fortune—Are you a somnambulist? And is this your usual time for paying morning calls?" was the greeting.

"Well, I was wakeful—'tisn't the sort of night for sleep—so I thought I'd come round and have a chat with you, and finding you weren't here, I collapsed into a chair, where I've been ever since," answered Guy, with an elaborate attempt to appear careless.

"Deuced close night!" exclaimed Bertie, throwing himself on a sofa close to the window. "Don't go, Guy; I'm in no hurry to turn in. Have another weed? and hand me some seltzer, there's a good fellow. I'm too done up to move."

Bertie's face was excessively flushed, and he spoke fast and excitedly.

Guy looked at him gravely, and doubted the advisability of staying, when he felt that he could not speak without in some way referring to the subject which was uppermost in his mind.

"It's so difficult to find you in the daytime, and it's so long since we've seen each other," he began, and then there was a pause. "Bertie," he continued, looking up sud-

denly, "I'm a bad one at beating about the bush: I had something to say to you, and I could not rest without saying it."

Bertie glanced rapidly at Guy, and then, quietly knocking the ash off his cigar with apparent calmness, "What's in the wind now?" he said. "Is Erlesmere burnt down; are you going to get spliced; do they want to make you Lord Mayor; or what other fearful calamity is weighing on your anxious mind?"

"In one word—is the rumour, which couples your name with that woman's, true or false?" asked Guy, half rising from his chair and pointing with upraised hand to the ever-smiling pictured face.

Bertie flushed crimson.

"Upon my soul, Guy, I wont submit to this. I'll stand a good deal from you, but I'm not a child in leading-strings. It's almost time you began to remember that. I can't help your interference in some of my concerns; but leave *her* alone," he answered angrily, "and leave me alone."

"Things have gone far enough," said Guy, "if this woman has power to make you turn against me so readily." Then he added, bitterly, "Report does speak truly

for once then: you are being fooled by this woman?"

Bertie replied, with forced calmness, "Any report that joins my name to that of the most beautiful woman in town, does me too much honour; but we will drop the subject, if you please—I admit no one's right to speak of her, or her affairs, to me!"

Guy had risen and was pacing up and down the room.

"Do I understand you rightly?" he said, pausing in his walk. "On any other subject I may venture to speak to you, but on this, which most concerns your honour and your happiness, I, your brother, must hold my peace? Listen, Bertie: if you will not hear me as your brother, let me speak as your guardian; let me give you, not my own view of this matter, but the view which every man of the world would take of it."

"It was an infernal delusion that ever made you my guardian," retorted Bertie, flaming with unrestrained passion. "Thank Heaven, I shall soon be free from your cursed interference."

"Have I ever abused the small authority I may have over you? Have I ever showed anything but a true interest in your con-

cerns? Have I ever pestered you with advice, or done anything to give you an excuse for speaking like this?" said Guy, trying to master his rising agitation and speak calmly. "On the contrary, Bertie, I care too much what becomes of you to let you go your own way to ruin without saying a word."

"I dare say I seem awfully ungrateful," said Bertie, half ashamed at the remembrance of all he owed to his brother; "but I am not, really; only you must not speak of what you cannot understand."

"I understand enough to see pretty clearly that this woman has power to make a fool of you—has power even to make you marry her if she pleases."

Bertie's face crimsoned again, but he did not speak, and Guy went on: "Is it possible that you, well born, highly gifted, with all the world before you, can mean to give the name which your father and mother held in highest honour into the keeping of an actress and adventuress, sprung from the very dregs of the people, who nightly bares her limbs and displays herself for gold; a base woman who is the talk of the town—the——"

"It's a lie!" screamed Bertie, springing from the sofa, white with rage. "I would kill anybody who dared to tell so foul a lie. Have you nothing better to do than to repeat the slanders which are sure to attach to a beautiful woman in her position? I would stake my soul she is as pure as my own mother."

"I believe it is possible that in deed she may be, though the world says otherwise," responded Guy. "She is too cold, too *intrigante*, to give herself for less than her proper value. In plain words, she'd never be a man's mistress when she knows that if she plays her cards properly she may be his wife. But is it possible, voluntarily, to choose the life she has chosen, to feel no shame at appearing in public as she appears, and yet be pure-minded—fit for your wife?"

"I have told you," exclaimed Bertie, passionately, "that you speak of what you do not understand; you repeat the trumped-up lies you have picked up during the day you have spent in London. What can you know about it? Shall I tell you the truth—not for my own sake, but for hers—that you may no longer repeat these

slanders? She is as well born as I am. She is the daughter of a poor Italian lady—a Contessa in her own country—and when her mother died she was forced to go on the stage through dire necessity; it was not her own choice—she had no other means of living."

Guy almost laughed. "And she told you this?" he asked.

"No, she did not tell it me. They are well-known facts. I heard them before I saw her. I am a gentleman, and would not ask a lady of her antecedents; and she is too true a lady to boast of her birth. I alluded to it once in her presence, but she said scarcely anything."

"Ah! I thought she'd scarcely tell you that. Cel—Estelle, I mean—is not the woman to indulge in a story which is sure to be found out. She must have known that sooner or later you would hear the truth. You have told me all you know of this woman's antecedents; now, shall I tell you all I know? and I think you will find I am a little better informed than you."

Bertie stared in incredulous amazement. Guy hesitated a moment, and then he spoke again—

"It is nearly ten years ago now, that a certain little Italian girl sang and danced for money in the streets of Rome. She was in the charge of an old Frenchman, who starved her, beat and neglected her, till she was very near to death. One day a friend of mine, an Englishman, who had long noticed and pitied the child, felt he could bear the sight of her miseries no longer. To make a long story short, he rescued her, found the old man had no claim upon her — she was the daughter of a ballet-girl, one of the lowest and most disreputable of her kind, who had died from misery and want in a garret—got rid of him for ever, and brought the child to England. Then my friend placed her in a school where she would be well educated, thinking that in the future she would be able to earn her own living." Guy paused for a moment, and then he went on: "Last August twelvemonth I saw this protégée of my friend's. She was a child no longer. She had become a beautiful woman; but she had grown hard, cold, and worldly—setting no value on her beauty but as a means of winning money and admiration. She had gained a bad character amongst those with whom she had lived,

and she made no good impression on me. Bertie, I have never seen that woman again until this evening. Celia Ragoni, the dancer's daughter, and Estelle, the actress, are one and the same."

"I don't believe you; there is some mistake," stammered Bertie, convinced nevertheless by the earnestness of Guy's words, that he had listened to the truth.

"There is none, Bertie; believe me, I tell you the truth. I have only told you this because I saw you were labouring under a delusion as to this actress's real origin. I should not have told it to any one else. If Celia chooses to keep her former life a secret, she is welcome as far as I—I mean my friend—is concerned. She behaved with great ingratitude to him. She chose this life in opposition to his wishes—though surely he had some right, after all he had done, to express a wish as to her future; and, worse than all, she deceived him—led him to believe that she had given up the thought of it."

"What right had he to try and control her?" muttered Bertie between his teeth.

"The right of the interest he had taken in her," replied Guy. "And she would

have been a better woman, in all probability, if she had taken his advice."

"How absurdly you speak," retorted Bertie, "as if actresses and sin were synonymous. I hate such cant."

"I mean nothing of the sort. Heaven forbid that I should say so. I believe that there are women on the stage as good and pure and true as it is possible for them to be under the circumstances, for I hold that you cannot touch pitch and be quite undefiled. But these women have friends and relations to guard them, they are more retiring and modest to start with, and they do not all appear in the costume Estelle appeared in to-night, or dance as she did."

There was a silence. Guy had seated himself, and was leaning on the table, with his head resting on one hand, facing his brother. Bertie, his face red, his eyes burning, a heavy scowl on his forehead, had thrown himself back again on the sofa, and was plucking the white rose that had adorned his button-hole into a thousand pieces. Guy looked up and spoke suddenly —"Tell me the truth, Bertie. Is this the woman you would choose for your wife?"

"I will tell you the truth; you have

driven me to it," cried Bertie, raising himself, his face convulsed, his voice choked with passion. "It may be that I might not have chosen an actress for my wife, but my love for this woman is beyond all control. If she were all that you say, if I knew her to be wicked and worthless, I would still marry her; I would give up everything—everybody for her." Guy dropped his face on his hands. "Remember, you have forced me to tell you this. I would have spared you if I could," continued Bertie, excitedly. "Tell me any lies about her that you please, you will only drive me closer to her; for if all the world calumniates her, the more need that I should stick to her—I, who know her to be pure and good and noble. They call her cold, and I glory in it, for I know that it is to me only she is kind."

Guy raised his face.

"May I ask if she is equally devoted?"

"I do not see that you have any right whatever to ask. If she hesitates to marry me, it is solely on my account, because she knows what people like you will say about it."

"She has promised to marry you, then?" asked Guy, still speaking in a hard, suppressed tone.

"I've reason to believe that she loves me. I am the only man she shows any real favour to. I believe that she will marry me. I would shoot myself if she didn't," responded Bertie, speaking half to himself; then turning suddenly on Guy, "What right have you to put me through this cross-examination? Have you almost done?"

"I have only one more question to ask you—one that I think I have a right to ask: What has become of Kitty Lorton? I presume you have broken off your engagement with her?" answered Guy, very coldly.

"I suppose you will accuse me of behaving badly to her now?" retorted Bertie, scarcely knowing what he said in his passion. "It may be a disappointment to you to hear that the—I mean that I am not quite as black as your fancy paints me. It was Kitty Lorton's own doing that we separated. However glad I may be of my freedom now, I was not then; and moreover did what not one man in a hundred would have done. When her father died, I wrote to her and offered to marry her then—not from love, for the transient boyish love had all died out—but because she was friendless, and I was in some degree bound

to do so in honour: and she refused again to marry me, in more unmistakeable terms than she had done before. So that sin at least you can't lay at my door."

"You can scarcely blame me if I did," said Guy, with a slight flush on his brown face. "You have chosen to keep me in the dark about it. I don't mean to retaliate, Bertie, but times do alter so—things do not change so quickly with me. It seems but a little while ago you asked my help in that matter, and told me you loved her; now, you are raving of your love for another woman."

"I mistook a boyish fancy for love," Bertie muttered, resting his head wearily on his hand, and his face, surrounded with the curly golden hair, looked strangely old and worn in the bright garish light that fell on it from the open window. "I'm not much of a one to talk of these sort of things, and it would probably be as unintelligible to you as Arabic would be to me, if I told you of the intense love I have for Estelle. Guy, I usen't to be quite a heathen, but I'd sell my soul to-morrow for that woman."

Guy shuddered. Remembering all the love

his mother had borne this boy, the care he had vowed to take of him, it almost sickened him to hear such words from his lips; and through all the horror and despair there came wild thoughts of Kitty—Kitty free—that made Guy's heart beat thick and fast, and set his brain on fire; but he tried to crush them. What time was it to think of himself and his own love when Bertie was rushing headlong to ruin, and must be saved? But how? What was he to say to him—to do for him?

It never occurred to Guy, as it might have done to some more practical men in his position, to ask Bertie how he, who had so little but what he received from himself, the elder brother and sole inheritor of the wealth of the Lawrences, intended to make a marriage without his approval.

If the idea of using this argument had passed through Guy's head he would have rejected it immediately. He would have felt that he could not use this advantage which fortune had given him, over his brother, as a means of forcing him to compliance with his own wishes; moreover, he knew that to threaten would have been the sure way to lose any influence he had over

Bertie—the sure way to make his young brother set him at defiance.

Guy Lawrence thought and thought—words seemed so useless, arguments so hopeless. At last he looked up and spoke suddenly.

"Bertie, I feel it is only throwing away words to speak to you now. As well try to convince a madman of his own insanity, as you of the utter ruin of such a love as this."

"Not at all," with a reckless laugh. "I know it's a madness, but it's one I'll stick to."

"Bertie, Bertie, what can I say to you?" said Guy, rising and coming towards his brother. "Young one, you don't know how all my hopes have been set upon you, how I've thought of the life that was before you, and tried to think of all I could do to make it a happy one; and now, to see everything lost like this!" Guy paused, his voice shook, he could scarcely go on. "Bertie, for poor mother's sake, think just once, what she would have said to this—she, who loved you so. I can't speak to you of myself—of anything I've done for you—Heaven knows it's been little enough — but, Bertie, if I had

any claim on your consideration I would urge it now; not simply and solely because this woman is an actress, but because she is what I have proved her to be—hard, cold, and selfish; overwhelmed by one passionate desire for admiration—such a woman as would ruin any man's life."

Bertie's head had sunk on his hands, but now he started up.

"You do not know her."

"I know her too well, but I don't hope to convince you. You will prove the truth of my words some day, when you see her as she is." Guy spoke slowly and sadly. He stood for some minutes by Bertie's side, looking down on him, then he suddenly turned and walked to the door. His hand was on the lock, he hesitated, came back a few steps, and stood by the table, his face white and set. And then he spoke hurriedly, with an effort. "Bertie, you think perhaps that I oppose myself unnecessarily to your wishes—that I have no sympathy, no feeling for you; you wouldn't think that if you knew all. I almost think I will tell you, though I never thought a word of it would ever pass my lips. It may have some influence with you. You will know at least that I have cared

for your happiness more than for my own."

There was a minute's silence, then he went on. "I loved a woman as devotedly, as passionately, as is possible for a man who has only loved once in his life—and I helped you to win her for your wife."

The words were simple enough, but through the tone and the manner of the man who spoke them with such quiet dignity, there thrilled an infinite pathos.

"You? *You* loved Kitty?" ejaculated Bertie. "Good Heavens, Guy! what can you mean? It seems so incredible, so impossible."

"Does it seem so absurd that I should love any one? Ay, I don't look much like a lover for a young girl," somewhat bitterly, and with a glance at his own reflection in an opposite mirror — at the deep-scored lines, the white streaks in hair and beard, the haggard eyes. "I wasn't so bad then. I thought once I might have won her love, but I never spoke to her, because you loved her—at least you told me so."

"Guy, Guy, what have I done? I never knew it, never dreamt of it; but it isn't too late. Kitty is here, at Clara Hoare's

house. I don't believe she ever loved me—perhaps——"

"Stop, Bertie! It is not for this I told you of my folly, only because——"

"I know everything you would say. For Heaven's sake leave me alone. I can, I ought to bear a lot from you, but this is too much."

Guy turned away.

"Good-bye," he said, pausing a moment at the door. "I wont fight you in the dark, so I warn you I'll do my best—all I know—to prevent this marriage; and I swear that I will prevent it if it lies in my power." And then he was gone, out into the bright morning light and the silent streets, with a tumult in his heart, a terrible unrest that mocked at the idea of sleep.

Tortured by a remorseful feeling that he had not fulfilled the trust which had been laid upon him, that if he had taken better care, if he had not been so afraid of seeming to watch and spy upon his brother, this would not have happened; tormented by sudden rushes of a hope that was more sickening in its uncertainty than a despair that had been certain, how was it possible for Guy Lawrence to rest?"

## CHAPTER III.

THE following morning Guy Lawrence strolled into the Park, and made his way towards the well-dressed, languid, *dilettante* crowd that thronged from "Booby Corner" to Albert Gate. He had two objects in view—to find out how Kitty Lorton came to be staying at the Hoares', and to discover the address of Celia Ragoni, alias Estelle the actress.

The first Bertie could tell him, and the Row at midday was the most likely place to find him. As to the last, half the men in London would know the retreat of such a *lionne* of the *coulisses*. But though Guy had sauntered some distance, he had not come across a single acquaintance with whom he was sufficiently intimate to stop and discuss such matters. He felt strangely lonely in that crowd, few of the faces seemed familiar to him. He had been a

wanderer so long, and time had wrought great changes in this kaleidoscope of fellow-beings; it was almost saddening to feel so like an alien in their midst. It was a great relief to him therefore when he espied Bentham, stretched on an iron chair, with his hat tilted forward to shade his eyes, languidly smoking a cigar.

"Hollo, Bentham! how are you?"

"Done up—almost at my last gasp," replied Bentham, as he extended a hand lazily to Guy.

"Not from over-exertion, I'll bet. What have you been doing?"

"Doing, my dear Lawrence? Existing; and if that isn't exertion enough to kill a fellow with the thermometer at ninety, I don't know what is."

Guy laughed as he threw himself into a vacant chair.

"Aren't you rather inconsistent in your remarks? I was wondering how a fellow could kill himself through existing."

"Oh don't be so confoundedly logical. Who can always stick to truth? Rotten Row's not the bottom of a well. Deuced soon that well would be pumped out if everybody drew upon it. No, *mon ami*, that

sort of tipple's too insipid for the present taste. Society goes in for stimulant, prefers Champagne Mousseux, though it's made of gooseberries, to the purest draught that ever came from — what is it? — 'limpid streams.' Look at little Teddy Fanshawe, there—dark man on the grey horse hanging over pretty little woman by the rails. He is the greatest gossip in the clubs. He's telling her how some poor beggar's going to the dogs or some other fellow's come into a fortune, or, no — she looks pleased — then the mischief's about a woman—sure sign, you know, when a woman laughs. Then look at old Lady Telletaile—see how her confounded old tongue's wagging; something new and nasty from the Divorce Court, no doubt. It's the case with 'em all, my dear fellow: they live upon scandal, and if the world stuck to truth and stopped the supplies, they'd starve."

"There's always plenty going on, I should imagine, to meet the demand, without falling back upon fiction."

"Exactly; but what goes on is known to all the world an hour afterwards—thanks to the papers—and so becomes stale news: to be original it's necessary to invent. Pshaw!

there's not a single being in this crowd who wouldn't tell a lie to make a *mot*, or slander his dearest friend to flavour a scandal."

"You've become quite a cynic, Bentham," laughed Guy as he lighted a cigar; "the Diogenes of the nineteenth century. How is it you've left your tub and cabbage-leaves, eh? You might growl till you were tired there."

"Come out for—what is it?—ozone, and to see the two fine sights that Vanity Fair can show, horses and women."

"By the bye, speaking of horses, has Bertie been riding to-day?"

"Yes, saw him half an hour ago on a bright bay mare—wonderfully nice thing she was too."

"How many horses does he keep, do you know?" asked Guy, looking slightly serious.

"Can't say, exactly; there's his pair of chestnuts, a grey for night-work, a park hack, and I don't know which of his hunters he has kept, but I think he's got a couple. Then, you know, besides these, he and Leath have got a team of roans between them."

Guy bit his lips, and a shade of vexation came over his face.

"They are all worth money, too," con-

tinued Bentham, "cost him high prices, I expect." He paused for a moment, then turned to Guy. "I say, Lawrence, is the young one coming into much tin? Because if he doesn't, it strikes me he'll come to grief."

"Why do you think so?" asked Guy, hastily.

"Why? Well, the style of his *ménage*, and the pace he's going. Look here, you know, Lawrence," Bentham continued, lolling back in his chair and crossing his legs, "it's no affair of mine, and it seems rather sneaky to speak to you of these things; but the young 'un's always been a pet of mine, and I shouldn't like him to go to the dogs."

"It would be a real kindness to him and to me to tell me why you think all this," said Guy, earnestly. "I paid his debts when he left college; he hasn't had time to do very much harm yet, I should think."

"I don't know. Master Bertie has a wonderful talent for getting rid of money. Got into a bad set too—Leath, Pearce, and Co. Leath's a fool and only dangerous that way, but Pearce bleeds him at cards and billiards—pretty freely too. Then that team leads to no end of Richmond dinners and demi-monde accompaniments, which

mean the choicest wines, the rarest fruits, and everything that costs most money. And then, you know, last but by no means least, Estelle: the earrings, bracelets, and things of that sort they say he gives her, would fill a Bond Street window."

"She's not over particular then—accepts men's presents, and all that?"

"My dear fellow," said Bentham, opening his eyes, "who ever knew a dancer who didn't? Do you imagine that her salary pays for the bijou house in Curzon Street, the brougham and steppers, the diamonds and laces that are the very soul and essence of the beautiful Estelle? *Sapristi!* Have you really *quite* forgotten the world and the ways thereof?"

"I might have known it—they are all alike," muttered Guy, savagely. "I couldn't expect that she would be an exception."

"Understand, I don't mean to insinuate anything against her morals—*au contraire*, she's fearfully proper—keeps an old woman, sheep-dog, you know—on purpose to take care of her, dear innocent lamb; never appears in public without her. But she's the very devil with men! Twists them round her finger; fools them to any

extent; cleans them out, and then throws them over. She's as hard as granite, as calculating as a Jew, and as vain as—I know nothing with which to compare 'La Belle Sorcière's' vanity—it's incomparable, insatiable."

"If she's so cold and heartless, what's the meaning of her penchant for Bertie? You say she shows him some sort of preference?"

"Can't say," answered Bentham, languidly; "never attempt to fathom women's motives. Means to marry him, I suppose."

"Marry him?" cried Guy, hastily turning his chair.

"Yes, of course. No doubt she could get scores of men with more tin than Bertie, but they are cads, and wouldn't suit her book. She's ambitious and wants to get an entrée into society, and she thinks as Mrs. Deverell she could manage it."

"Does she?" muttered Guy, knitting his brows. "He shall never marry her—I'd rather see him dead."

And there was a silence, and after a while Guy rose and turned to go.

"Good-bye, Bentham," he said, briefly, as he held out his hand.

"By-bye, old fellow! Don't fret about the young one; he'll pull through it all."

After he had gone a few steps Guy turned back.

"Bentham, do you know that woman's address?"

"Estelle's? No. — Curzon Street," with a slight elevation of the eyebrows.

"Thank you;" and Guy pushed his way resolutely through the crowd, and left the Park and the gay idlers behind him. He had made up his mind. He would go to this woman. Having failed with Bertie he would try her—he would not let the smallest chance slip through his fingers—but he was in no fit mood to face her yet.

Guy Lawrence was determined that Celia Ragoni should not read in his face any traces of the agitation that was in his heart. He had some fear, some idea which could scarcely be put into words, that to Bertie's relationship to himself might be traced part of the encouragement which she had shown to the boy; that because he, Guy Lawrence, had wounded her vanity, had known her in the days of her poverty and misery, she had tried her power on his

brother, willing to show him that she had not overrated it.

It might be that he was wrong, but if Celia was nursing up some triumph of this sort, Guy felt that the worst thing he could do would be to let her see that he dreaded her power—she was just the woman to use it remorselessly.

No, he would not go to see her just yet; he would wait a few hours until he felt better able to meet her with a smiling face. He had resolved that if it were in any way possible he would discover from her whether she loved Bertie or not, and for this end he must make himself agreeable to her—no very difficult matter, from all he had heard; it is so easy to please a vain, ambitious woman for a short time.

So he went back to his hotel. On the table lay a note from Bertie; he tore it open:—

"Dear Guy,—You asked me about Kitty Lorton. I don't know whether you heard me say she is in Grosvenor Square, at Clara's. She is a sort of governess there. She'll be glad, no doubt, to see an old friend.

"Yours ever,

"Bertie."

Kitty a governess! then it was true: she was dependent, friendless, homeless, among strangers. Poor little girl! — so light-hearted, so merry in the old days. What a change for her!

How well Guy recalled the picture which was for ever graven on his memory, of the girl who rode through the wood with the sunlight falling on her chestnut hair and her blue habit, and the trees forming an arch over her graceful head.

How the merry laugh rang on his ears still; how the bright blush which dyed her face as she caught sight of him still brought an answering flush to his own at the mere remembrance.

How could he bear the thought of that little head bent wearily over torn copy-books, that soft childish hand drilling rebellious fingers over dreary exercises, that ringing, merry voice raised to the note of command? The picture was so intensely incongruous and painful.

Guy Lawrence forgot to be grateful for the fact that Kitty's lot was much better than it might have been—that she had fallen among friends. He only remembered that she, delicately reared, sensitively natured, had been left to fight her way in

a world of which she knew practically little or nothing. Why had he not known it sooner? Why had he been kept in ignorance? Why had he not been told that she was free?

How all the old tender love so long repressed surged up in his heart! How the passion that was no longer sin or dishonour, overleapt all barriers, and overwhelmed him with its force, till he—strong man though he was—almost trembled at the thought of the little fragile girl who might be his yet, to protect and cherish through life, unto death!

So long, so long he had dwelt in outer darkness, this flood of new light blinded and dazzled him.

His soul was sick with passionate longing to be near her. Only to see her little tender face, pale as he had seen it last. Only to touch her warm, soft hand, and to know all the while she was free: and some day, some glorious day, when he had won back some of her love, he would be able to tell her all.

Ah! would she listen to him?

Would she still be as hard and cold and bitter against him as she had been when

last he had seen her; or had time and sorrow softened her, and taught her to judge less quickly?

Guy Lawrence felt that if he let his mind dwell on these things he would not be able to turn his thoughts to anything else. It seemed to him that he had no right to think so much of his own love—his own hopes and fears, when Bertie was in danger, "going to the dogs." How those careless words, spoken so thoughtlessly, rung in Guy's ears. He felt that if in this case it had been possible by any sacrifice of himself to have saved Bertie from what he felt would be irretrievable social and probable moral ruin, he would have made it willingly and gladly.

But it was not. It seemed that his powers of endurance were not to be so tried again. If his influence over Celia Ragoni failed, he would have to stand by, helpless, and watch the ruin which he would not be able to avert.

How could he indulge in any dreams of happiness for himself, when Bertie, his mother's boy, was rushing blindly on a fate which would mar his whole life?

If it had been possible to read Guy

Lawrence's thoughts in his face, as, late in the afternoon he turned his steps towards Curzon Street, I think one might have seen written there something very like hatred for the woman towards whom he was hurrying.

The room in which he found himself a few minutes later was eminently characteristic of "La Belle Sorcière."

It was brilliant and luxurious, but the brilliance was immensely overdone. The gorgeous hues of the drapery, the costliness of the furniture and ornamentation, the heavily perfumed air, the strange medley of various objects—some of them exquisitely beautiful in themselves, but utterly spoilt by their surroundings—were all redolent of the woman herself.

The easy, piled-up cushions of rich-coloured velvet seemed thrown down for the Sybaritish repose of the beautiful form; the subdued light that fell through the tinted sun-blinds seemed modulated for the languor of the heavy-lidded eyes. A jewelled fan, a half-emptied cup of rarest china, a little handkerchief—all lace and no cambric—were lying together just as she had left them. Celia Ragoni had gained her wish. She was at least as grand—if

reckless extravagance be grandeur—as "any of them," the fine ladies whom once she envied as they rolled past her in silks and satins, reclining in soft-pillowed carriages, while she, humble and obscure, trudged along on foot.

Ay, she at least had gained her heart's desire—poor and mean and paltry though it had been.

Guy wondered whether she was content, whether these things seemed to her as well worth the possessing as she had once thought them: or whether she too, like all the rest of the world, was haunted by the curse of satiety.

"But gratified vanity goes a long way," thought he, with a sneer; "I suppose she'll be satisfied as long as she's the rage."

It was little wonder that the new actress had created a furore. As the heavy blue velvet *portières* were pushed aside and she swept into the room, the sneer died from Guy Lawrence's lips, and prejudiced against her though he was, he could not but confess that her beauty was a thing at which to wonder.

She was even more perfect in her fuller maturity than she had been two years ago.

If she had seemed beautiful the night before in her gossamer robes or her tattered serge, she was ten times more so in her daylight attire. She wore a dress of richest-coloured violet satin, trimmed with a profusion of rare old lace. The body was cut square across the neck, and the sleeves were open and hanging; delicate white lace was drawn over her snowy bosom and fell in soft folds about her rounded arms. Round her neck a band of violet satin held a brilliant diamond cross, and jewels sparkled on her arms and fingers; her hair, looking dusky in the shaded room, was brushed smoothly back from her low broad forehead, and was coiled in thick plaits round her head.

She was thoroughly well got up—she had made the most of herself in every particular; and yet she had the art of letting her magnificence seem part of herself, as if it belonged to her and was not a studied effect.

"I scarcely dared to hope you would come," she said, holding out her hand to Guy Lawrence.

"Why not?" he said, smiling. "Should I be the only one to refuse my homage to the Queen of Beauty?"

Celia threw herself back among her cushions and signed to him to seat himself by her side. Then, for the first time, Lawrence became aware of the presence of a third person, a very small person, who coming in behind Celia, had been invisible, absolutely obscured by her magnificence.

"So that's the sheep-dog," thought Guy, bowing in token of a very slight introduction from Celia.

Propriety was engraven in every line of the widow's insipid countenance—in her cap, in the stiff folds of her bombazine dress, in her smile, in the very manner in which she folded her hands across a spotless cambric handkerchief on her lap. She was so intensely and assertively proper that she looked hypocritical, and Guy took an aversion to her on the spot.

"I thought," said Celia, looking down, "that perhaps you would feel you couldn't forgive me, and that you wouldn't care to see me; but I am—oh, so glad you have come!"

"How could I help feeling glad to see you?" said Guy, vaguely, his eyes wandering in the direction of the lady opposite, inwardly speculating as to how far Celia

had taken her into her confidence, and whether she wished him to allude to things connected with her past history in the presence of another person.

Celia followed the direction of his eyes.

"Mrs. Robarts, wouldn't you like to go for a walk?—it's so fine. I need not detain you. And would you mind taking Frou-Frou? she'll be all the better for a run. *Va donc, petite*," said she, unceremoniously shaking off the presence of her chaperone much as she shook off the little white curly dog which was nestling in the folds of her dress.

"Certainly, if——" said the mild lady, rising to go.

"If I can do without you? Oh yes—I need not keep you to-day," answered Celia; and Guy, as he rose to open the door for Mrs. Robarts, pitied the unfortunate woman who was compelled to submit to the haughty impertinence of this girl, who was so winningly gracious to those whom she cared to please.

Then Guy came back, and sat down on the cushions by her side, close to her, and looked into her eyes long and steadfastly without speaking, till Celia, who had grown

hardened to the boldest stares, blushed as she raised her eyes to meet his.

"What is it?" she said at length, uneasily. "Are you angry with me? Can't you forgive me?"

"You, who cared nothing for my advice or my wishes, can care little for my forgiveness," he answered, coldly, forgetting in his truthfulness his desire to please her.

"But I do—I do. Ah, you can't think how I felt last night when my eyes first rested on your face! You looked so cold and cruel, you seemed to be upbraiding me. I knew that I deceived and disobeyed you, who had been so kind to me. I was tired and faint, I could bear no more, and I almost fell," pleaded Celia; and her face, softened into supplication, melted Guy's coldness as the snowdrift is melted by the rays of the sun.

"What right have I to upbraid you?" he answered, hotly. "You have gained the triumph, the admiration, and all the things you so much desired. You are satisfied; what should I want more, or what does it matter to you that I would a thousand times rather see you humble and obscure than leading the life you lead now?"

"What harm is there in the life?" answered Celia; "it suits me."

"It suits no woman to forfeit respect for admiration, modest retirement for public display; but as for talking to you of these things now, *cui bono?* It's a little too late."

"You are very hard on me," she faltered, drooping her beautiful head.

"Am I really? What then," said Guy, impatiently, "can't you be content to let any one escape you? Must you number every one among the ranks of your slaves and admirers? Be appeased. I acknowledge your triumph. You are everything that can be desired—as an actress."

She looked up at him, her eyes glittering, and broke into a radiant smile.

"It has come true—it has come true," she said, clasping her hands together. "Don't you remember my words, 'What you call ruin—I will make my triumph?'"

"'Tis only that we call things by different names," he said, coldly.

Her face changed suddenly.

"Ah! you will never be pleased with me; you are prejudiced against me."

"You complain of that as bitterly as if

you had done this thing for the mere sake of pleasing me. You forget that you did it in opposition to my wishes," answered Guy. "But surely you are satisfied; with all the world at your feet, what can it matter to you that only one man—a very insignificant and long-forgotten member of society—refuses to acknowledge that you have done wisely in becoming what you are? What does it matter to you that my eyes are so unfortunately clear that they cannot take the brightest glitter for real gold?"

"My success is real gold to me, and tha is all that matters—as you say," retorted Celia, haughtily. "Where should I be now? what should I have gained by it, if to satisfy a whim of yours I had renounced my ambition? What right had you to expect that I should give up everything for you, who cared so little?"

"None at all—at least, I never did expect it," replied he, calmly.

And then there was a pause, and Guy began to remember that the conversation was drifting a way he had not intended it to go.

"But, Celia," he said at last, drawing

closer to her, and looking down at her admiringly, "all this is past. The present and the future are all that remain. Wont you reinstate me into my old character of guardian, and tell me all your confidences—make me *au fait* at all your conquests and secrets? Who is the most favoured among the many who worship at your shrine?"

She returned his gaze, and the rich colour deepened on her cheek.

"Why should I trouble you with my confidences? You take no interest in me or my concerns."

"Yes I do," he answered, taking her hand in his; "more, a great deal, than you can think."

Celia did not know what meaning his words bore, but he spoke them truthfully enough.

"What have I to tell you? It is only just as I foretold it would be—a great deal of admiration, very little love. You will tell me that is all I can expect, being what I am. But did any one *ever* love me?"

"It would be strange indeed if they did not," answered Guy. "You are deceiving me or yourself, Celia; you are not a woman to be seen and not loved."

He spoke half to himself, and looked at her half unconsciously, so earnestly that she dropped her eyes uneasily.

"It is hard to tell the real from the sham in love, and everything else. I don't take the trouble to try. I class them all together, and value them for just as much as as they're worth," she answered with a laugh, and then she turned to him. "But you stand apart from all the rest; you are different—to me. You wont quite forsake me, you won't be ashamed to come and see me sometimes?"

"I'll come—till you tire of me and my grave face," said Guy. "I'm afraid that will be very soon; it's the prerogative of beauties to be capricious."

"To every one else, but never to you—never to you," she answered, looking straight up into his face with her great eyes.

It was little wonder that Guy Lawrence, looking down into them, felt it was easy enough to play the part he had laid out for himself; easy enough to look admiration and sweet flattery in that most beautiful face.

But though he could not be insensible to the charm of her beauty, he never for one

moment forgot that it was she who was the cause of his brother's infatuation; and he never really softened to her.

He lingered on and on, talking a trifle *à tort et à travers* of anything but the subject that was uppermost in his mind, for still he had not attained the chief object of his visit; he had not even mentioned Bertie's name.

He almost resolved that until he knew her better he would not attempt to use his influence over her in this matter, in any direct manner.

Her vanity, which made her so apt to take offence at anything he said, would be set on fire at the bare supposition that a love for herself was a ruinous thing—a thing to be dreaded as a degradation.

Guy Lawrence, realizing the intense pride and self-assertion of this woman's nature, began to think that it would be worse than useless to appeal to her generosity to save Bertie from a marriage with herself, or to urge upon her to do so in remembrance of the obligation she was under to him, her benefactor. He began to fear that by doing so he might only drive her to show her power more terribly and

certainly than she had done before. It would be better perhaps to trust to time to strengthen the influence he possessed over her. He felt that it was already great; that from some cause, perhaps from old association, a remembrance of the time when he was to her almost a demigod, her preserver from misery and death, Celia Ragoni attached more importance to his words, his praise, or his depreciation than to any other's.

He resolved that he would do anything and everything to gain more and more power over her, but that at present it was not safe to put it to the test.

Still he greatly wished to discover from Celia whether she loved Bertie or not. Till he knew that, he was working in the dark. But it was difficult to mention him to her, to speak indifferently on a subject on which he felt so deeply.

Accident helped him at last. Celia was speaking of his unexpected appearance at the theatre on the previous evening.

"Yes," answered Guy, seizing the opening, "it was quite a chance that took me there. I was dining with my young brother, and he—by-the-bye, he is one of

your most devoted admirers. I suppose you knew of the relationship, though we bear different names?"

Celia hesitated a moment, and then she looked searchingly up in Guy's face.

"Yes; I knew he was your brother."

"Not much resemblance though, is there?"

"Some," answered Celia; "but you are much older, and—wiser."

Guy fancied there was a hidden sarcasm in her words.

"I wish *he* were wiser," he answered; "he gives me much anxiety."

Celia laughed.

"Your brother must be much obliged to you for troubling yourself. Do you constitute yourself his guardian angel?"

"I am his guardian, though I can't lay claim to any angelic qualities. He isn't twenty-one yet, you know."

"And I suppose you think he is going to the bad, because he frequents theatres and other wicked places?"

"I wish that were his greatest weakness," answered Guy; then he added, with slight hesitation, "he is frightfully extravagant, and he's got into a bad set—a set that's likely to lead him into trouble."

Celia threw a quick glance at him as she played with a diamond bracelet on her wrist. Guy following the movements of her restless fingers, caught himself vaguely wondering whose gift it was.

"Celia," he said impulsively, laying his hand on hers, "a beautiful woman has far more influence over a boy than a man. I wish if you ever have an opportunity you'd try and persuade Bertie of his folly."

"He must be very different from his brother if he can be influenced by me," she replied, lifting her gleaming eyes to his face.

Guy looked at her long and steadfastly.

"You depreciate your own power. Do you remember what I said to you long ago? That beauty such as yours—— Well, I must go before I lose my senses." And he rose to leave as he spoke.

Celia rose too. Her hand lingered in his, her face softened into tenderness.

"You will come to see me again?"

"I will come — when you want me. You can always find me by sending a note to my hotel, Long's, in Bond Street. Good-bye." He hesitated a moment, as if he would have said something, and then he dropped her hand and left her.

She stood there a moment, looking after him, and then she turned, and throwing herself down on her cushions, sank into one of the strange, crouching attitudes peculiar to her; and with her arms resting on her knees, her face supported by her hands, her eyes looking like smouldering fires in the half-light, she sat there in a sort of trance.

It was not possible for any one who did not understand the concentrated power of Celia Ragoni's nature to believe how all her thoughts and desires had been set on this one thing—that Guy Lawrence should acknowledge her triumph.

It had been her ambition to become a famous actress; but her success would have lost half its charm if it had not been possible for him to witness it.

Through all the weary drudgery, through all the dearly-bought glory, she had thought of him. She herself did not know why it was so—why she cared more for his opinion than any other. Perhaps it was that her nature, vain and worldly, thus unconsciously acknowledged the superiority of his; or that he, who had first appeared to her in the character of preserver and saviour,

had become to her, who was so utterly religionless, the object of that reverence which, in some form or other, is almost necessary to humanity.

Certain it was that she, who was defiant of all others, feared him; and in her inmost heart dreaded his scorn, longed for his admiration.

Sometimes she almost hated him, because he was the only one who opposed her wishes, spoke unpleasant truths to her; and when he did yield her admiration, did it in a semi-satirical sort of way that made it worse than depreciation.

To have gained Guy Lawrence's love—to have made him foolishly, senselessly in love with her, as other men were—Celia Ragoni would have sacrificed her soul; nay, what was more to her than her soul, the luxuries, the gratified vanity, that were the very essence of her present life. To be able to toy and trifle with him, to laugh at him, to hold him in her power—not because she loved him, but because he had scorned her, thought badly of her—ah! that would be the greatest of all conquests.

Some instinct had taught her that this young brother of his was dear to him, and

now she was sure of it. As her thoughts wandered to Bertie Deverell, a slow, strange smile spread over her face. Was she thinking of the power she had gained over one brother, through the other who loved her so passionately?

Was she thinking how clearly she had read Guy's thoughts, when he spoke to her about Bertie? Was she, as she sat there with a fierce gleam in her eyes, a cruel smile on her lips, crouched like a tigress ready for a spring, thinking how surely he would one day come to plead to her, to ask a favour of her—and be refused? Surely there was little hope in trusting to the merciful forbearance of a woman who could look as Celia Ragoni looked then.

And Guy Lawrence left the house utterly dissatisfied with his visit—with what he had done and left undone. He felt that he had most signally failed in all that he had intended to do.

Face to face with this woman, the words that he would have spoken to her had died on his lips, and he felt that in trusting to her gratitude and generosity he had indeed been leaning upon a broken reed.

He could only bide his time, and wait

and hope, resolving never to lose sight of her. But of one thing he felt convinced: that whatever love this woman was capable of, that love was not for Bertie. He had watched her narrowly, and in spite of all her caution, he felt tolerably certain that she had no tender feeling for the boy who by a few false smiles she had made her slave.

Poor Bertie! Guy ground his teeth and clenched his hands with passion as he thought of his foolish, frantic adoration for this vain self-worshipper; and vowed that at any risk, any cost, he should be saved from being made her victim.

## CHAPTER IV.

KITTY LORTON was alone in Grosvenor Square. The children had gone out with Mrs. Hoare and Lily Ransford—a merry carriage-full. From her place in the window the little governess watched the start, till the sound of rustling, of voices and laughter died away. The carriage with its gay burden rolled off, the street-door closed with a bang, and she was all alone in a great empty house, with an afternoon of liberty and solitude before her.

She felt strangely lonely and desolate all by herself, poor child! it was all so silent, and the sunshine, though it might be pleasant and bright enough outside, fell with a pitiless, scorching glare on the bare dull walls of the school-room. There were no soft-tinted blinds, no fresh flowers to relieve her eyes, no luxurious pillowed couches to

tempt her to repose, no seductive novels to while away the weary hours; only a dusty horsehair sofa—to think of lying on it made her head ache—a few brown-paper-covered lesson-books, some broken toys, and an old piano. It did look dreary; it did seem hard that all the happiness and the brightness and the fun should belong to some lives, and all the dulness and weariness and heart-aching to others. It seemed to her so strange that such different measures of happiness should be meted out to her and to them. Was it according to merit or to blind chance? Was it her own fault, or only her fate that, ere she had well begun her life, all the light and the sunshine should have been blotted out of it? She seemed too young and too pretty to be sentenced to solitude and dulness, and sometimes she chafed piteously against the stern decree which seemed to have been passed against her, condemning her in her youth and her loveliness to be one of those solitary ones who have no place, no vocation in the world; who seem to have altogether missed their proper place, and to be neither useful nor happy. Her life was not a busy one, and she had no hopes, no

cares for others, to fill up her spare thoughts and moments. No occupations or beguilements either. She could not venture out alone. There was not one in all the great busy, pleasure-seeking city, into which she had come a little forlorn stranger, to call her friend; and how could she wander amid the bewildering labyrinth of streets, or in the crowded parks, solitary and objectless? Nothing to do either. What was the use of being active and energetic, of striving and hoping, when there was no object which seemed to her worth the attaining? Better to fall into apathy and quiescence, to live out her life, not try to alter it. She would soon get accustomed to the dulness and monotony, she would soon get so used to the shade that her eyes would shrink from the sunshine. She was beginning to feel something of this already, to dread any attempt to drag her into the outer world. A morbid self-consciousness had grown upon her with long solitude, which was in reality foreign to her nature.

She had always been more of a dreamer than a materialist, and in these days she lived half her time in a land of dreams, which was very different from the commonplace world around her—a land in which a

bright being, a glorified likeness of herself, was always living a life so different from hers, so full of love and adventure and goodness; but, alas!

> "One of these lives is a fancy,
> But the other one is true.

But to-day some chance word had dispelled these visions, and they had fled like so many pale ghosts. Her thoughts were wandering back to past scenes, past days. The mention of a name had brought them all to her mind—a name that seemed only like the echo of one that had been familiar to her long ago—Guy Lawrence. The same and yet not the same; not the man whom she had loved and looked up to as something grand and noble, and far above herself—that was the ideal; this one, of whose return and presence at his cousin's reception she had heard mention a day or two ago, was the real Guy Lawrence.

Kitty thought that it was only the remembrance of what he had once been to her that made her still attach so much interest to his name that the mere mention of it had power to make her cheeks flush, her heart throb. She thought that she scorned him, despised

him, and had no remnant of feeling left for him, either way; that she could meet him calmly as the veriest stranger; but the bare idea that he was in town, and that she might some day accidentally encounter him face to face, had made her restless and nervous, and more than ever inclined to hide herself. She felt now that she could not bear to meet him—to have to endure his pity, his condolence. She was no longer one of the world of which he formed a part.

He would probably scarcely recollect her, and she would rather be forgotten by him who was so painfully connected with the remembrance of her past life.

So buried in her reverie was Kitty Lorton as she sat there with her arms resting on the table, her chair tilted forward, and her fingers buried in her disordered hair, that she only became conscious of a knock at the door when it was repeated.

"Bother!" she muttered, pushing back her hair and arranging her tumbled collar. "Come in;" and looking up, she saw Guy standing there, hat in hand.

She rose up and stood by the table without taking his outstretched hand, feel-

ing that she hated herself for the hot flush that was mantling her face.

"Mrs. Hoare is not here—she's gone out."

"I did not expect to find her here, but the servant told me you were in this room. I am quite at home here, you know. I always find my way up here when I come to Grosvenor Square. I prefer to enjoy the society of my small cousins *au naturel*—not when they are in their company frocks and company manners."

"They are both out now with their mamma," replied Kitty, frigidly.

"And you—wont you pardon me for coming here to seek you? I suppose I ought to apologize for intruding in this room, now it is your retreat as well as the children's?"

Whatever awkwardness and constraint Guy Lawrence might feel, he did not show it in his manner—that was cool and quiet enough; but Kitty stood twisting her fingers in and out, getting red and white by turns, horribly conscious of her own nervousness and of her shabby black frock and untidy hair. She had felt so safe in this room, where visitors never intruded,

she had not even taken the trouble to dress herself becomingly. She felt profoundly ashamed that Guy Lawrence should see her like this. He, who was so critical and fastidious, was probably making inward comments upon her attire, and contrasting her appearance with what it had been. She knew she was altered—terribly altered; her glass told her that, when it reflected a little face from which the bright, fresh colour, the *verve*, the sparkling brilliancy, had utterly fled; but still there were gradations of beauty and ugliness, and at this moment she felt that she was looking her very worst. She did not know that Guy was gazing down at her with such a tumult of passionate feeling in his heart that he could scarcely speak to her and keep it under restraint; she did not know that he was absolutely unconscious of the shabby frock, the fuzzy hair, the rumpled collar—that he saw only a little pale face, with sad eyes, and tender, sensitive mouth, and felt that, saddened and changed though it was, it was more lovely to him in its sweet sorrowfulness than ever it had been in its gaiety.

She did not know how, through all the sleepless hours of the previous night, he had

thought and thought of her, till the longing to see her had been too great to resist. She did not know how he had watched and waited till he knew she was alone; she did not know all that was in his heart to say to her now, all the wild words of love and tenderness that were trembling on his lips.

Kitty did not answer his last words, but she stood there as if waiting for him to go.

"Wont you give me a warmer welcome after my long absence?" said Guy, gently. "I have not seen you for more than a year."

She flushed crimson as she remembered how she had last parted from him.

"I thought I should see you the other night. I came here to Clara's reception. Why weren't you downstairs?"

"I?" answered Kitty. "You forget that I am only the governess. I don't go down when there is company, and I don't receive visitors up here."

"Do you mean to say that Clara——"

"I mean nothing of the sort. Your cousin is everything that is kind; but I am

out of place at such parties, and you—you are out of place here," answered Kitty, angrily.

"Miss Lorton, how can you possibly——"

"I know I seem very rude, but, Mr. Lawrence, you place me in a false position by coming here, by remembering in any way our former intimacy. As long as your mother was alive and—and things were different——" Kitty hesitated, paused in inextricable confusion.

"If my mother had been alive," muttured Guy, "all this would never have been. She would never have allowed you to become a governess. But it is not possible that you can do me so much injustice as to suppose that because—no, it is too absurd to put into words—too bad even for you to believe it of me. Kitty, you do not know how much I have longed to see you—to speak to you."

"You?" exclaimed Kitty, turning round on him, her face blazing; "you forget that I know more of the world than I did two years ago. I am not quite so credulous, so easily made to believe in people's fine speeches, as I was once."

Guy looked back at her with a troubled face.

"You might have believed all I have ever said to you. I never spoke an untruth to you in my life," he said, quietly.

"Never spoke——" she began, with a sneer; but then her face changed suddenly. She remembered the want of dignity there would be in any reproaches, any references to former scenes. "But all that is past," she added, quietly, "past and gone, and things are changed. Mr. Lawrence, thank you for coming to see me; you meant to be kind, but indeed you do not know how your visit may do me harm. Mrs. Hoare does not know, will not understand, perhaps. I must go." And Kitty moved towards the door, but Guy sprang forward and caught her hand.

"Stay, Kitty. I would have spoken to you less abruptly. There were many things I wished to say to you, but you will not have patience, you will not hear me; only this you *shall* hear——"

He paused, and in his eagerness clutched her hand so hard that she looked up at him with a half-scared expression on her little childish face, and then he spoke.

"Kitty, I came here to-day to ask you to be my wife."

She turned deadly white. Slowly the surprise and bewilderment faded, and in their place there came a passion that was almost fury.

"You came here," she gasped out between her half-closed lips, "to insult me again—a second time. Not content with making me your dupe, your plaything, when I was a mere child and knew no better, had no knowledge of the honour of gentlemen, you think to deceive me again, now that I am only a governess."

She paused breathless, and Guy, letting her hand drop, folded his arms, and looked long at her, very sorrowfully.

"I half expected this," he said, gravely. "You have a right to speak like this to me, perhaps—that is why I did not attempt to say one word of love to you. I only asked you to be my wife. There could be no mistake about that. I thought you *could* not construe that into an insult."

Woman-like, she only caught at one word he had uttered.

"Love!" she echoed; "*you* would scarcely dare to speak of love to me!"

"Kitty," he said, very gravely, "you are so passionate, so hasty—you don't ever pause to think. What can be my motive in asking you to marry me, except it is that I love you?" he dwelt tenderly on the word, and then he added, "ay, so dearly, so truly, so unceasingly."

She did try to think. She passed her hand over her forehead as if to clear away the confusion of her thoughts.

"Motive?" she said. "You know best. I cannot tell, except it is that you want to see me again supplicating for your mercy, confessing my senseless love, imploring yours——"

A spasm of pain passed over his face.

"Have some pity, if you can," he exclaimed. "You believe you have a right to reproach me, but spare me the remembrance of the bitterest torture I ever endured. Kitty, that day in the library at Erlesmere, I would have given my life—ay more, my soul—to have been able to speak one word to you, to have been able to tell you that I loved you."

She had grown pale and still, and she stood gazing at him with dilated eyes as he spoke on.

"You stood there before me, and with your simple words, your looks, confessed that you loved me. Can you think what an infinite torment it was for me, who loved you so dearly, so unutterably, to hold my peace, to keep myself quiet and still, to prevent myself from snatching you to my heart?" His voice broke; then he went on more quietly, "And yet I was bound in honour to keep silence. I was fettered by a vow which sealed my lips—no, listen to me, you must hear me," he continued, arresting her as she would have spoken. "You have done me injustice too long, and I have borne it because I thought myself obliged, but now that I am free to speak, I will."

The earnestness of his manner awed Kitty, and she stood silently, with one hand resting on the table, as if to support herself, still pale and trembling, with a passionate light in her eyes.

"You doubt that I loved you; you will not believe me when I tell you so. Oh, child! how can I find words to express all that you were to me in those days? Even if I could, you would not understand. It was the dearest hope of my life that I might

win your love, win you for my wife; and one day when we rode together — you remember that day under the trees — I could not quite suppress my passion, and I fancied that you must have understood, have known something of what I felt."

"You attach too much importance to an idle flirtation," Kitty interrupted, with a bitter laugh; "it's fair sport to amuse yourself with that sort of pastime when you are in the country—is it not? I was only a child then, and it was my fault, no doubt, that I misunderstood you."

"But for the accident to St. Dunstan, I should have told you everything then and there," continued Guy, scarcely heeding her words, "and there would have been no misunderstanding. Kitty, you have done me a cruel wrong. You have thought hard things of me, and I have not been able to justify myself. I thought I should never be free to tell you the reason why I could not ask you to be my wife, though I loved you better than anything in the world—the reason why I could not tell you the truth, though I would have given my life to do so, when you came to me afterwards: but I may now. Oh, Kitty, listen to me;

my darling, hear me. The day after my mother's funeral, I learnt that Bertie loved you, that all his hopes were centred on you, and for his sake, because I had vowed to secure his happiness at the cost of my own, I gave you up to him, and I tried to overcome my love, to persuade myself that you did not love me. Have you no feeling for me—can't you imagine what I suffered?"

"I can imagine what an easy sacrifice it was. I can imagine that having gone almost too far in a flirtation with a little country girl, you were very glad to find your brother was willing to marry her."

"Kitty," said Guy, sternly, "you should not say these things. What have I done, that you will not believe me when I tell you the truth?—I, who have never told a falsehood in my life."

"What have you done?" she repeated, overcome by her passion. "Let me tell you once for all—even if I die of shame afterwards for having said it. You led me on, little by little, into loving you. You made me forget to hide my love, because I was so sure it was returned, and then—you came to my father and proposed I should marry your brother. I could not believe it—

I thought there was some mistake. I rushed to you; and you—you know the rest: how you made me lower myself in my own eyes—how I left you, humiliated—disgraced." Her voice broke into a sob, and she hid her face in her hands.

Guy caught them away, and tried to draw her to him.

"My darling, my darling! you know now why it was. You would believe me if you knew how my heart has been aching for you all this weary time."

For a moment she rested in his arms, as if the dream, unreal though it was, was too sweet to break. Then she drew herself away.

"You would have me believe in such a love as this—a love which has no pity, no mercy; you who robbed my life of all its happiness, and made me what I am—a sad, sorrowful woman—not a happy, innocent child—will tell me that you love me!"

"It may be that I was wrong—I sometimes think I was; I should have considered you before all. But oh, Kitty, forgive me! Let me by my love and care atone to you for all that is past; let me make your life happy, and shield you from every sorrow. Oh, my darling, come to me!"

He held out his arms, and the tears stood in his eyes. She looked in his face for a moment, and then she broke out into bitter sobbing.

"I can't, I can't; you don't love me."

Guy came closer to her, and took her hand in his, and tried to raise her little tear-stained face; and when he spoke, his voice was very husky and broken.

"I do love you, Kitty; I do love you."

She looked up into his eyes, as if she would read his very soul.

"No," she said, very slowly, and shrinking farther away from him. "I have been deceived once; I will never trust again—the waking is too bitter."

"What can make you so hard and cold? Tell me, only tell me," pleaded Guy. "What can I say, what can I do, to prove how much I love you?"

"If I am cold and hard, it was your work. The childish trustfulness of those days that are gone will never come back to me; you destroyed it."

"For pity's sake spare me these reproaches. I may have deserved them, but I cannot bear them from you," exclaimed Guy. "Oh, Kitty, dear, be more like your-

self. Only speak to me once in the old way. Tell me that you will try to love me again, and give me the right to protect you. My poor little girl, you are too young and tender to face the world all by yourself."

"You would marry me out of pity, then?" she asked, still speaking in the same hard, bitter tone. "I have heard that you are charitable, but that is carrying your benevolence rather too far; and I, who would not let Bertie stoop to marry me from love, will scarcely let you marry me from pity."

"Kitty, this is all high-flown nonsense: even if the greatest social barriers existed between us, love has power to sweep them all down; but they do not. You, and you alone, are able to make me intensely happy, or unutterably miserable. Speak only one word, darling, and tell me that you will love me again."

He took her hand in his, and looked down at her with his face softened into inexpressible tenderness; and she looked back at him with a terrible yearning in her heart, which, for a moment, showed itself in her eyes; but then she drew herself away.

"Love you!" she answered; "you taught me the folly of that long ago."

Guy was silent for a moment, and then he spoke very earnestly.

"Tell me the truth, and I will believe you. If it is only some question of foolish pride, or some remembrance of fancied insult or injury, that you would raise up between us to separate us; if all the while you love me still, I will throw down all your objections, and win you in spite of yourself; but if—oh, Kitty, for God's sake don't deceive me!—if all the love you once had for me is gone, dead, and it is beyond your power to revive it, then I will leave you; I wont vex you any more with my entreaties, I will go away from you, and never speak to you of my love again."

Guy's voice gave way suddenly, and he paused for a moment.

"You cannot tell how hard it is to feel that the hope which has been so suddenly revived is to be crushed out again," he continued, passionately. "Nothing but the assurance that you do not love me, will make me leave you now. Oh, Kitty, speak quickly! tell me, don't you love me just a little still?"

And the girl stood before him, her small hands tightly interlaced as if by the pressure she could still her trembling limbs, her breath coming in short gasps, her face drawn and strained, her lips parched and quivering, a terrible struggle going on in her heart—the conflict between her pride and her love. Her love, which made her long to throw herself in his arms, and rest there for ever content. Her pride, which made her remember how once this man had rejected her, how it was now in her power to revenge the insult. Ah! which would conquer?

In that short time of bitter agony to them both, the fate of their lives hung on her trembling lips, and still she could not speak.

As through the mind of a drowning man there flashes, in the instant preceding death, a vivid retrospection of his whole life, so in that moment of terrible indecision, there flashed through her mind the remembrance of all the past.

The remembrance of a summer morning's ride, of a dream of love half-realized, of a terrible awakening, and a cruel blow, dealt by the hand of the man she had

loved—and in spite of all the bitter anger and fierce resentment she had so long nourished against him, she knew that through all there had been in her heart a strong under-current of love, which time had not been able to conquer, which surged up now, and with its pent-up force threatened to beat down all the barriers her pride had raised up against it.

Looking up into his face, aged and saddened, noting the streaks of silver in his hair, she dimly realized that he, too, had had his share of suffering, and with the instinct so strong in every woman to administer comfort, she longed, with a terrible longing, for the infinite happiness which might be hers, if only she could forget the past.

So fierce was the hurricane of conflicting feeling warring within her breast that she felt bewildered; she could not realize her actual position, she could not credit the fact that it had come to this; that he, Guy Lawrence, stood before her, waiting for her answer to the one question on which he had built all his hopes—stood before her, asking her to be his wife; and she, who had in her shame and fury longed to humiliate him as

he had humiliated her, hesitated to answer, hesitated to speak and cast away the love which not long ago she had told herself in her anger, would be, after all that had passed, the worst insult he could offer her.

And so Guy waited in vain for his answer.

At last he spoke.

"Wont you tell me, Kitty? Will you love me? Do you love me? Only yes or no?"

Some sudden thought, some bitter remembrance, fired her, and she spoke at last; though the word lingered on her trembling lips, as if it would condemn its own falseness.

"No!" she said, looking at him with a desperate courage.

"Is that true? You could not tell me a lie. Is the old love hopelessly dead? can you never love me again? Tell the truth, Kitty, as you would before God, for both our lives hang on your word."

Her face blanched, but still she clasped her hands together with the same effort after self-command.

"It *is* true. I do not love you—never can love you again," she answered, her

words coming very slowly and solemnly, as if they were tolling her own death-knell.

He fixed on her a long, steady look of unflinching scrutiny, and then he withdrew his eyes and turned away to the window without a word of answer.

He looked out into the glaring sunshine with strained, aching eyes and a haggard face. He had received his doom. He was a man; should he cry out, though the sentence was death? Should he, who had so long learnt to suffer, break down because this last blow was unexpected and worse than any former one? Her love was beyond her control; should he seem to blame her because she had taken it from him, thinking him unworthy of so priceless a gift?

Only a few minutes he stayed, with his face turned from her, waiting for complete outward tranquillity, and when he turned round there was a look on his face of such wonderful, patient, silent endurance as one sees seldom on the face of a man born to fritter away his troubles in words, but sometimes in a dumb animal of the higher species.

It awed Kitty. She felt how small her

petty passions, petty pride, fancied wrongs, seemed by the side of such a great agony as had dimly traced itself on the man's face.

Almost, she would have spoken, and withdrawn the lie which her own lips had uttered but a minute ago; but the very hopelessness of the calm, the very depth of the despair which seemed to have fallen on Guy Lawrence, made it impossible for her to break through it, and seemed to forbid her to confess her falsehood.

He held out his hand.

"Good-bye; do not vex yourself for me. You could not help telling the truth—you were always true. Only, before I go, may I ask you if there is anything you will let me do for you, as a friend?" He paused for a moment, cleared his voice, and then went on. "I am so much older than you. I was foolish to build any hopes on what was, after all, only a childish fancy. Forget all that; I can't help feeling grieved—my mother would be if she were alive—to think you wanted for anything. Wont you tell me if I can ever give you any help—for her sake?"

Kitty felt as if she were choking.

"There is nothing—nothing you can do. I am very happy," she stammered. And then she felt that he dropped her hand, and with one long sorrowful look of farewell, like the lingering gaze that one casts on the face of the dearly-loved dead, he left her.

The door closed, and she rushed to it, and fell on her knees, and pressed her face against it, and listened to every footstep that bore him away. And then the hall-door slammed, and she knew he was gone—gone out of her life for ever; and with a low cry she threw herself prone on the ground and hid her face in her outstretched arms.

Surely, surely, she moaned to herself, no sorrow could equal her sorrow; no despair equal her despair. She loved him with all her heart and soul and strength; and she had sent him from her—cast away his love with her own foolish hands. There lay the bitterness of the sting. She had done it herself; she could no longer murmur at fate, or complain that her lot in life was harder than that of others, for happiness, great, inconceivable, undreamt-of, had lain within her grasp, and she had thrust it from her.

She had stained her lips with a lie, the remembrance of which would haunt her through all time with a terrible remorse. And he had called her true, had accepted her sentence as inevitable, because it had not been possible for him to doubt her truth. Then, and not till then, had she felt how utterly false she was, how utterly unworthy of Guy Lawrence's love.

As she lay on the ground, in the utter abandonment of her terrible sorrow, hiding her face from the bright, pitiless sun, there came to her a dim prevision of her own future. She seemed to behold all the great waste of life stretching out before her: a wilderness of weary years, in which their two paths, his and hers, which should have lain together, would be for ever separated, in which she would have to walk alone, unsupported, unsolaced—alone to the end. And she half realized then, that though after the lapse of years, this present sorrow would be as a thing that is past, it would yet cast its shadow over her life—that never again could she love, and suffer, and repent as now.

In the loneliness, the terrible dulness of her young life, she had prayed f

change to break the long monotony, the daily unending weariness; and it had come—the chance of a great, wonderful happiness—and in the madness of her pride and folly she had cast it away.

In the reaction of feeling all her pride had gone from her, and if it had been possible for Guy Lawrence ever to believe her, she would have been almost ready to confess that in saying she did not love him, she had told a lie—she would have been almost ready to humiliate herself a second time in his eyes. But he was gone from her for ever. So she told herself; but even as the thought passed through her brain, she cherished some vague, secret hope that it was possible for this terrible darkness to brighten, that she might see him once again, and seeing him, show him by some word or look that her heart was not quite hardened against him, that there yet remained in it some tenderness for him.

Utterly worn-out with sorrow, she raised her pitiful little tear-blistered face from its hiding-place, and gathered herself up preparatory to seeking the shelter of her own room.

Tears are luxuries in which only the rich

and those who have no irksome duties to perform, can indulge. She could not hide her face in solitude, and her swollen eyes and sorrow-stained cheeks would cause remarks which she did not care to encounter.

"So I must not even cry," she said to herself, with a great sob in her throat, for it seemed to her just then, poor child! as if the burden of her self-caused trouble was almost greater than she could bear.

And a man walked along the sun-scorched streets with rapid footsteps, heedless where he went, with a bitter agony in his heart which rendered him insensible to the burning heat—the agony of a great despair, an irreparable loss: the loss of a love which had once been his, which now he knew would never, never, through all time be his again.

## CHAPTER V.

ON that night Estelle gave a supper-party. They were much sought after, these little suppers of Estelle's—dainty, recherché feasts, where the guests were well chosen and the cuisine irreproachable.

Estelle, with the tact of a clever hostess, with the *savoir vivre* of a woman of the world, was careful that these small feasts should be free from the constraint of a formal entertainment; that they should savour rather of the bonhomie of Bohemianism than of the conventional dulness some seem to think inseparable from propriety.

But while relying much upon the social attractiveness of her suppers, she never ignored the sympathy between the mind and body; and knowing that the nearest way to men's hearts was through their palates—at least for the hour—insured the culinary success of her feasts by securing the

much-sought-after services of a noted *chef*, who drove to the house in his brougham, and removed his hundred-guinea diamond ring to truss an ortolan.

Most of the guests were assembled in the drawing-room. Lounging on a sofa was a handsome brunette, superbly dressed and brilliantly bejewelled—Adèle Trébillon, a star of the Variétés—which star, unlike most of the continental luminaries, had not yet fallen—now in London on a professional visit. By her side, languidly stroking his heavy moustache, Lord Albert Slingsby, of the 1st Life—a handsome, sleepy, Titanic, fair-haired sabreur. Beside these, Percy Danvers, of the F. O.; Mina Belton, a rising young actress, as handsome as Venus and as proper as Diana; Tom Grantly, one of the most successful dramatic authors of the day, who was realizing ten thousand a year by his sensations; and Bertie Deverell.

Estelle was reclining on a dormeuse in an attitude of graceful repose, giving little heed to the court that was being paid her.

The last theatrical scandal was discussed, the last *mot* of the coulisses related, but on this evening, contrary to her usual

manner, she appeared *distraite*, while every now and then she cast expectant glances towards the door.

The full light of a chandelier fell upon her where she lay, making the snowy whiteness of her skin, the exquisite tints of cheeks and lips, the brilliant eyes, absolutely dazzling.

The strongest glare could only show up her brilliance, but could not bring out a flaw or a blemish in the marvellous colouring that was nature's own handiwork. No art could have lent her one charm which she did not possess already; no semi-light was needed for the enhancing of that beauty which was perfect in the fresh bloom of youthful maturity. But all that talent—or rather, a French modiste—could do for her, had been done. On this night she had abandoned her usual preference for gorgeous colours and costly heavy materials, and her trailing draperies of purest white fell in cloud-like masses around her as she lay back on her couch with that grace which gave her the air of an empress. Opals and diamonds were shining among the laces on her bosom, and a tropical flower with crimson petals gleamed in her hair.

There came a sudden light into her rest-

less eyes, the door opened, and a servant announced "Mr. Lawrence."

As Guy approached, a flush of pleasure overspread her face, and as he took her hand, in a low tone of reproach she said—

"I feared you weren't coming. Why are you so late?"

"I was delayed on my way here," replied Guy, gazing with admiration at her wondrous beauty; "but I'm only five minutes over time."

"Only five minutes!" laughed Celia; "five ages of torture to Monsieur Soufflet."

"What a despot is a *chef!* Shall I go to the kitchen and apologize?"

"I'm not sure it would be safe. Will you take me in to supper?"

Guy offered her his arm, and at this moment caught sight of Bertie, who was looking at him with ill-concealed surprise and annoyance. Guy nodded recognition, and turned to his companion.

The *portières* were drawn aside, and they entered the adjoining room. On the table were epergnes containing the rarest cut-flowers, dishes decked with the choicest fruits, camelias that had required the most delicate culture, luscious grapes that had

won their growers prizes, gigantic pears, a single one of which had cost as much as the monthly wage of a rural labourer; the whole brilliantly lighted with white wax candles in artistic candelabra, while the air was laden with the aroma of pastilles.

Then was served one of those epicurean feasts which had rendered Monsieur Soufflet famous. Meats that lost their identity in the elaboration of their flavourings, cunning dishes so ingeniously introduced as to give fresh zest to appetites already satiated. Rhenish of the rarest bouquet, and Comet clarets—tributes from the cellar of a youthful duke, who little prized the mine of wealth his ancestors had laid beneath their halls.

The conversation soon became general and animated. Smart sallies, ready repartees, short and pointed anecdotes, through the hum of which such utterances were heard as "Chablis," "Sauterne," "salmi of woodcocks."

At first both Guy and Bertie said little. Guy, unable to throw off the heart-sickness that his interview with Kitty had caused him, was striving to drown his recollection of it by constant draughts of champagne;

while Bertie, though trying to appear indifferent, was impatient at the marked neglect Estelle had shown him, and was beginning jealously to fancy that any preference she did accord was to Guy. It hurt his *amour propre* to think that, spite of all his homage, spite of all the claim he felt he had upon her love, he was so easily distanced by his brother, a comparative stranger to her, as he thought.

"Are these to-night's spoils, Mademoiselle?" asked Danvers, taking a camelia from a flower-glass and placing it in his button-hole. "Every conservatory in England is pillaged for your bouquets; you'll turn our country into a wilderness."

"An actress's reign is too short for that," laughed Estelle, but in a tone tinged with sadness, as she carelessly plucked a delicate rose to pieces; "the rage of an hour, at most the *mode* of a season."

"If you do lay our gardens waste, what then?" said Bertie, with a momentary touch of eloquence. "While a laurel grows, what worthier tribute to such as you? — the proudest diadem of your native country, one fit to crown imperial Cæsar."

"I prefer the flowers—they are prettier."

"But not so lasting."

"Still I prefer the flowers." She paused a moment, and then continued, haughtily, "The homage of my audience is to the actress, not the woman. I would have it so. I love the plaudits of the world; they are life and soul and sustenance to me. I live upon them; they are as vital to me as the air I breathe. Why do my admirers individualize themselves? Why do they pester me with senseless baubles, jewelled souvenirs, and perfumed billets, as sickening as the scent they reek of?"

She spoke scornfully, her eyes flashed with a look of hauteur, and with an impatient gesture she thrust away a peach that she had scarcely tasted.

"How inscrutable is a woman!" said Guy, with a contemptuous laugh, but with a dash of bitterness in his tone; "she despises the adoration she inspires: she fears the passion she creates. Surely they were wrong in making Frankenstein a man."

"Inscrutable? and yet you affect to read us so easily! Inconsistent, perhaps: cold and passionate, selfish and self-denying, tender and heartless, kind and cruel, a mixture of the serpent and the dove, gentle

as a faithful hound to those we love, fierce and relentless as a hawk to its quarry, where we hate."

"A list of contradictions," remarked Grantly, filling his glass with Roussillon; "do they not prove the inscrutability?"

"I thought *you* knew us better; it is your trade." Then languidly stretching her hand to a dish of superbly-bloomed grapes—"When will men who long to win our love, learn not to woo us? The prize beyond our reach is ever the most coveted: it has been so since Paradise—it will be so to all eternity." Her voice sunk lower as she finished speaking, and a wistful look was in her eyes, as if the words she had spoken were no affected cynicism—were but the echo of her heart.

"Don't let's talk of love," cried Adèle Trébillon, impatiently; "it's the wettest blanket, the most exigeant autocrat I know: a charming companion, but an intolerable master. It's like absinthe—a delicious stimulant, but very dangerous. Once let it get *la grippe* upon you—*eh bien!* the rest I know nothing about, but I've heard it's terrible."

"Can't think what the deuce people fall

in love for," drawled Slingsby; "it's a sort of moral bird-lime that anxious matrons spread for well-fledged pigeons; a thing that old birds fight shy of."

"What a lady-killer you must be, my gallant plunger," cried Danvers with a laugh, as he quaffed a bumper of Moselle. "When Venus finds Mars invulnerable, what an awful cut for Venus!"

And while the laughter and badinage were going on around him, Bertie was getting more and more ill at ease.

Jealous and wayward by nature, it irritated him beyond endurance to see Estelle bestow her attentions upon another. Hitherto he had rejoiced in her invariable coldness. To him only had she been kind, and her kindness had stood out in all the stronger relief, because to all others she had been so capricious and scornful. Was the love that he almost persuaded himself she bore him, after all nothing but a passing *tendresse*, an *amourette* of an hour, to be abandoned when it lost the piquancy of freshness? Irritation, wounded pride, angered jealousy—all were merged in the intensity of his despair, when the fear came upon him that she, whom he loved with all his soul, with all the fierce-

ness of his impetuous nature, set so little value on his love that she could wilfully sacrifice it to the gratification of a passing whim, the transient excitement of a new caprice; for what else could prompt her to look and speak to Guy with eyes and lips that too truly simulated a love which she could not feel for him, a stranger, and one so unlikely to attract her fancy? Every look, every word, tortured him almost beyond endurance: he felt that he could not sit there and not cry out in the agony of his heart.

And truly his jealousy was not without cause. When Guy left Kitty Lorton, he felt reckless of all that might befall him. Life was only a burden to be borne, with but one object, the performance of one duty. He was weary, sick at heart, and cynical; yearning in the agony of this last great trial, for oblivion of the past, for rest in the future; but there was no rest for him as long as Bertie's happiness was in jeopardy.

Guy felt just then that could he have given his life to secure his brother's safety, he would have yielded it up without a regret—ay, with a feeling of relief. But this could not be; through all the poignancy

of his new-born grief he must be true to his trust. Though his cross by its weight maimed and crushed his spirit till life became a curse, yet he must bear it, even unto the end.

He had come to this party, though he had felt a terrible longing to hide himself away with his misery, to bear it alone and unseen, because it seemed to him that he was not justified in losing any opportunity of watching and waiting for any opening which would enable him to come to his brother's rescue and save him from the fate which above all things he dreaded should befall him. He had come with no definite idea of the means he should use, but slowly and imperceptibly a new thought entered into his head.

He, though he was singularly void of self-conceit, could not but see how different Celia's manner was to him and to others. There was a softness in her eyes, a lurking tenderness in her voice, as she looked and spoke to him, that came into them at no other time.

Sharp-sighted though he was, he had not seen this before, but now it dawned upon him; then broke upon him, with sudden,

startling light, that it was something more than coquetry—something more than the mere regard that sprang from gratitude, that made her as she was.

Though he had pitied the outcast child, and felt an interest in the beautiful, clever, capricious actress, until now no other feeling for Celia had taken possession of him. No spark of reverence, scarcely of respect, had he ever felt for her. He had looked upon her as a woman, reckless, dangerous, unscrupulously ambitious—as a splendid tigress, which fills us with admiration as we behold its beauty, with terror as we gaze upon its talons. But now, for the first time, he thought of her as a woman capable of loving.

If she loved—and by one of those strange, unaccountable paradoxes peculiar to womankind, loved him—here was a power suddenly and startlingly revealed to him by which he could save his brother—a cruel, unmanly power to use against a woman; but he was not a man to do things by halves. He had resolved he would prevent this marriage at all hazards, and that he was justified in using any means to gain his end—the one object of his life, sanctified by

the vow he had made to his dying mother.

All this passed through Guy Lawrence's mind with strange rapidity. It was one of those crises which come to us in life; one of those sudden ideas which are almost like revelations—they take so strong a hold of our minds, that we cannot refuse to entertain them.

He recoiled from the thought of fighting a woman, and with such a weapon—her love for himself; but was it not fair that the love which she had made an instrument of torture to destroy his young brother's happiness should be turned against herself; that she should be fought with her own weapons, and should be made to suffer as she had made him suffer?

He almost resolved, as he sat there a few minutes in silence, heedless of the questioning glances that Celia from time to time threw upon him, that her love, if it really existed, should be his power over her; that he would use it remorselessly to convict her in Bertie's eyes.

What woman ever failed to show by some sure signs and tokens a love which she desired should be reciprocated?

Bertie's jealous eyes would not fail to note them, and he would learn, surely and unmistakeably, that this actress had been making him a tool and a plaything, and that whatever love she was really capable of, was for another.

Guy set his teeth, in a stern resolve to smother all his scruples; and if it were possible, if he were not arguing on false premises, to lead her on to commit herself, to show herself in her true colours, in the eyes of the boy who loved her so unwisely, and so far too well.

"When's the new play coming out, Grantly?" asked Danvers, as he devoured an olive.

"August, I think."

"Bad time for that sort of thing, isn't it? No one left in town, you know."

"No one at all to speak of—that is, about three million people."

"Save your smartness for your plays, *mon cher*. I mean no one in society."

"*Tant mieux*. You swells are so phlegmatic: the pit laughs at my mots, the gallery applauds my points, but the stalls, stately in their cynicism, sneer at my sentiment, and sleep through my situations."

"That's true," laughed Nina Belton, glancing at herself in a mirror. "Why *are* the stalls so cynical and sleepy—I've often wondered?"

"Simply affectation, and—dinner. Woe to the man who writes a clever play, than which there never was a surer opiate. Amuse your audience—don't instruct them. Suit their humour—don't appeal to their brains."

"If twaddle means success, why this dearth of dramatic authors?" asked Guy.

"Because all twaddle will not succeed; it must suit the folly of the day. The public are as fickle as a woman. You shall judge. Three or four years ago, two plays of mine were brought out simultaneously and acted with equal ability. The first was the result of anxious thought and careful study; the last was the careless jottings of imperfect characters and incongruous incidents. The first, which had cost me months of labour, was played exactly thirteen nights; the last, in all honesty the greatest rubbish I ever perpetrated, had a run of more than a year, and made a manager's fortune"

"But there must have been something in it," drawled Slingsby.

"Oh yes, there was; the something being an incident in the third act. I'll describe it. The scene is a factory, with real machinery—my heroine is a working girl—her dress becomes entangled in the wheels—alarm of operatives—appropriate music—a scream for help! My hero, a factory hand, and the girl's lover, rushes forward and drags her fainting from her danger, but in his turn is caught by the revolving shaft—amid shrieks of terror he is carried writhing round the whole machine—tremendous sensation! another turn of the wheel, and he is dropped at the feet of the scarcely conscious damsel, unhurt—storms of applause—and the curtain falls."

"Oh, yes; we all remember that," laughed Danvers. "You mean 'Peers and Peasants, or Rustics and Roués.'"

"Old Levison, the manager, wanted to make the fellow have his arm torn off—in fact, he tried it—false affair, you know, with imitation blood—but the blood was rather too much; the people liked it, but it made them ill."

They had returned to the drawing-room

after supper. Adèle Trébillon, having seated herself at the pianoforte, was singing one of the charming chansonnettes which had made her fame, with all the taste of a finished musician and all the *élan* of an experienced actress.

Celia was reclining on a lounge, playing with a small Maltese dog, but bestowing more attention upon a group in the balcony, composed of Danvers and Guy, who were smoking cigars—for it was the distinctive attraction of her parties that smoking and cards were permitted—and Nina Belton.

Bertie, though affecting to be talking to Adèle Trébillon, had been watching Celia attentively for some time. He felt chagrined beyond measure at her indifferent manner towards him. Humiliating as it was, he could not conceal the fact from himself, that all his solicitude on her behalf, all his real regard for her, had made so little impression that a comparative stranger had absorbed her attention all the evening.

"Why waste your caresses on a dog?" he said, approaching her and throwing himself into a chair by her side. "You bestow your favours where they are not appreciated."

She raised her eyes for a moment, as if to read the full meaning of his words.

"That's the fate of us all, it seems to me," she answered, in a tone of indifference.

Bertie bit his lip with vexation. "You spoke truth, Celia, when you said to woo a woman was a sure way not to win her." Then, in a bitter tone, "And yet people rave about the tenderness of women, and call them the link that connects earth with heaven. The gentler sex. Pshaw! for cold-blooded cruelty, for passionless devilment, a woman is to a man what a hawk is to a dove, a tigress to a tame cat."

Celia raised her eyebrows slightly, then with a careless laugh, taking the Maltese in her arms: "Listen to him, Frou-Frou—this is the way he woos us, *belle petite;* what think you of his gallantry? Well bred, are you? Wise dog! cling to your ancestry, it excuses everything, mignonne—even rudeness."

Bertie clenched his teeth to suppress the impatient words that rose to his lips.

"Celia, listen to me," he said, after a short pause. "What spirit of evil can possess you? Is your vanity paramount to every other feeling? Can the miserable,

contemptible rôle of coquette have any charm for you. Why do you treat me so?"

She kept her eyes fixed on the balcony, as if quite unconscious that he was speaking.

"Why don't you go and smoke?" she said, carelessly. "I wish I were a man, that I might smoke. In Italy one could; but in prudish, formal England, it would be *outré*, I suppose. With a cigarette one can be unconscious of everything beside—deaf and dumb and blind to the world, living in cloudland, in the realms of smoke. *Ay de mi*, I wish I had one now."

"If that be your ambition—a destiny that begins in the obscurity of cloudland, embraces wealth and fame for an hour, and ends in smoke—I think it's likely to be realized," retorted Bertie, with a savage sarcasm.

An angry gleam shot from her eye as he uttered this rude speech, but it speedily died away, and she replied in a careless tone, "*Eh bien!* we shall see: but don't attempt to cast my horoscope; the charm of the future lies in its mystery. Ah me! what wretched, contemptible, spirit-broken crea-

tures we should be if we foresaw it all. We dream of fame, we die in obscurity; we are sanguine of thousands, we win only hundreds; we hope for happiness, we suffer sorrow; we sow in joy, we reap in tears."

She finished speaking in a tone of cynical recklessness that was common with her.

"Life need have no such dismal future for you, Celia," pleaded Bertie, earnestly. "You know I love you—I have thought you loved me in return——"

Celia interrupted him with a merry, careless laugh. It was her nature to change her mood almost as often as she spoke.

"Are you laughing, Frou-Frou?" holding the little white silken mass to her cheek. "Is he not droll, *chère belle?* As if one could help loving so handsome and fine a gentleman; as if poor, frail woman could withstand his gallantry and *beaux yeux;* as if the coldest heart could continue cold before his ancestry and thirteen quarterings! We do love him, don't we, belle?—because he is so funny—and makes us laugh."

With an angry gesture and muttered curse, Bertie rose abruptly and walked

towards the open window. But the rudeness of his manner passed unnoticed by Celia, who, throwing herself back in her fauteuil, was dreamily watching Guy, with half-closed eyes, as if oblivious of all beside. "If *he* would love me," she murmured, "if he would only love me."

Though they were unconscious of the fact, Guy had been silently regarding them from the balcony. An anxious look of annoyance came over his face as he noted Celia's half impatient, half weary, wholly indifferent manner, and contrasted it with the reckless yearning of his brother.

That Bertie was in the toils there could be no doubt—never did foolish fly flutter more hopelessly in spider's web; but would the spider fasten her fangs, and suck her victim's heart's-blood from him, or was she lying in ambush for larger game, and fearful of scaring it by showing the deadly grip of which those dainty hands were capable?

"After all, perhaps I wrong her," he thought, as he noted the sad look that once came over her face. "If she does plunder her victims without remorse, what woman doesn't? There may be much good, there's

always some, lying hidden under that cold, hard manner, but Bertie's not the one to develope it. She's holding him for something, and I must save him, let the wrench cost what it may!" Then, as he saw Bertie turn angrily from her, "If I convince him that she doesn't love him, I may save him through his vanity—it's worth the trial."

As he approached, her eyes beamed with a pleased look, not of coquetry, but of real gratification.

"Ecarté, Deverell?" asked Slingsby, pointing to a table ready set. "Fortune's not half so expensive a mistress as Venus; one's blind, you know, and the other's so confoundedly wide awake," he continued, as Bertie seated himself. "What shall it be? something small—suppose we say ponies?"

Guy leant over Celia, speaking to her in low tones of fair Italia, of the bright, sunny land of her birth; and enchained her fancy, and revived her remembrance of the beautiful city from which she had long ago come. Her eyes flashed with pleasure, her cheeks glowed with her southern blood, as she listened enraptured to his voice. She was no longer acting a part.

As her warm breath fanned his face he

again felt the sensuous delirium of a dream, and though no spark of love for her possessed him, he seemed enthralled, intoxicated by the power of her beauty. As her hand lingered in his, and she murmured an adieu, he felt how fatal would her power be to one who loved her; how his wealth and life and honour, ay, even his soul, would be yielded up if she so willed it.

Yet, hard and cold and cruel as she was, deadly in her revenge, relentless in her hate, her heart yearned to him with a pure and holy love; a love that ennobled, for it made her feel her own unworthiness.

"That makes a hundred," said Slingsby, as Bertie rose angrily from the table. "Something wrong, eh, Deverell? Never saw you play so badly, by Jove!"

* * * * *

"I thought you said you did not know Estelle?" said Bertie, in an angry tone, after he and Guy had walked in silence some distance homewards.

"Did I say so?" replied Guy, lighting a cigar. "No, don't think I did. I've met her once or twice before."

He hesitated rather at the deception his words conveyed.

"Pity you didn't act up to all your precepts," said Bertie, with a sneer. "I'll tell you what, Guy, I hate cant in any one; you lecture me about this woman, and preach about her as a parson does of the bottomless pit, and then carry on with her yourself."

"But I don't fall in love with her—don't you see the difference? Tiger-hunting's capital sport; but you must kill the tiger, he mustn't kill you. One looks down the crater of a volcano *pour s'amuser;* one doesn't plunge into it."

"Oh, hang your cold-blooded sophistry." He spoke petulantly. "You pretend to have some sort of affection for me, you give yourself all kinds of airs as my guardian, and then, by heaven! you humiliate me before Estelle—go in for cutting me out, because you think she cares for me, because you know I value her love——"

Guy interrupted him with a provoking laugh.

"How you rave, young one; I didn't think you so easily taken in. Know she cares for you! Pshaw! It's because I know she doesn't care for you that I amused myself with her to-night. 'Pon my honour,"

he continued, knocking the ash from his cigar, "she's very handsome, talks and dresses well, which is more than can be said for most women of her monde, or any other. She's a wonderful actress, too; so she ought to be—she's always acting, on the stage and off; works up the agony splendidly, does the tendresse to a nicety, doesn't overdo it; but as for *l'amour sérieux*, there's only one person she cares a rap about, and that's —herself."

"What refreshing modesty!" said Bertie, with a sneer, his lip quivering with anger. "You don't do yourself justice; you detract from the glory of your conquest."

"There's not much glory in a conquest that is bought, I take it. It comes to be a question of the balance at one's banker's, then. You're not so green as to think that the Squire of Erlesmere, with his rent-roll, isn't more than a match for his younger brother, with such a woman as that—are you? A three-figured cheque would speak more eloquently than all your love-sick speeches. Women like Estelle don't go in for sentiment—it's waste of time, and doesn't pay. We part here, I suppose. Good night, young one!"

Bertie took the proffered hand sulkily.

"Pshaw! You're like the naughty boy that cried for the moon. I shall fancy you're jealous, if you look so savage. By-bye! See you again soon."

And Guy turned up Bond Street.

The moment he was alone all his gaiety and assumed carelessness faded utterly, and his brow contracted fiercely.

There was a passionate revolt against the part he had chosen to play, a bitter heart-sickness upon him.

It might be that it was necessary to use violent means to cure Bertie of his folly; but it was hard that he, Guy Lawrence, should be the operator whose hand must inflict the wound; harder still to know that he must seem treacherous and ungenerous in his young brother's eyes.

His own future rose before him, blackly and drearily, and he knew that it would be long before peace or forgetfulness could come to him; he knew that his love for the girl who had shattered all his hopes that day was not a thing to be easily buried in oblivion.

But still he would not take consolation from that last refuge of wounded vanity,

and think himself a martyr. "It's only my fate. How could she help it, poor little girl?" he said to himself. He thought too little of himself and his own deserts to consider it at all wonderful she had rejected him so unequivocally, or to blame her, and imagine himself hardly and cruelly dealt with. But there is a limit to human endurance, and all these things combined had almost tried his to the utmost.

To take refuge in flight was a confession of weakness, and yet he resolved that he would go away for a few days, until he had learnt to face this, his last and greatest trouble, as calmly as he desired.

"Pack my portmanteau," he said to his man that night. "I shall go to Erlesmere to-morrow. You can stay here; I shall only be away a few days."

And Guy Lawrence left town the following morning.

## CHAPTER VI.

ONCE a year, on the birthday of her eldest little girl, Mrs. Hoare, who delighted in an excuse for free-and-easy, out-of-the-way entertainments, gave what she called a children's picnic.

There were a few children invited thereto, but the majority of the guests were decidedly "grown up," though some of them were as gay, as light-hearted, as full of delight at a day's release from London formalities as the smaller portion of the assembly, who were usually, at the beginning of the entertainment, rather oppressed by the cares of their best frocks.

People were wont to enjoy these informal picnics more than the best of the grand dinners eaten *al fresco*, which usually went by the name, whereat there was no release from the usual monotonies, except the pleasure derived from getting the cramp by sitting

in an uneasy posture on the ground, or the excitement of making an occasional raid upon adventurous spiders.

Mrs. Hoare invited no acquaintances, only friends; and insisted on a real, veritable picnic, in which they all waited upon themselves and each other, dispensed with the powdered footmen and their troublesome grandeur, and made merry over the usual mishaps inseparable from these sort of feasts.

This year the Greyhound, at Hampton, was to be their head-quarters, and a remote nook among the trees in Bushy Park their dining-room. There was to be music and dancing at the hotel after the dinner, and they were all to drive home, not later than ten o'clock—"because of the children," Mrs. Hoare explained; but she was not a very strict disciplinarian, and there were some among her young friends, as she in the glory of her matronhood called them, who cherished hopes of keeping up the dancing to a much later hour.

But any way the children must go. Having got up the picnic on purpose for them, it would not do to leave them at home; and so of course the little governess must go

too, whether she liked it or not. She did not like it. She pleaded hard to be let off, for fond as she had once been of gaieties, her heart was too sore for her to take any pleasure in them now.

But Mrs. Hoare, in her gay, coaxing manner, urged upon her how impossible it was to trust the children to other care; how she would have to look after them all day herself if Miss Lorton refused to come; and pleaded so hard for her help and her presence, that Kitty, always easily influenced by kind persuasions, gave up her objections and promised to go.

And then she had to make another concession. One morning Mrs. Hoare came into the school-room and began chattering in her gay way, and by degrees led round to the one inexhaustible subject of interest to womankind—dress; and then "What was Miss Lorton going to wear at the picnic?"

Kitty looked down ruefully at her black dress—the best she had; at the worn, brownish crêpe and general dowdiness. And then it came out, little by little, that Mrs. Hoare, like many other gay people, had an insuperable dislike to mourning—not to black, worn as a set-off to fair skins

with the relief of some other colour; but to mourning, crêpe and heavy materials, worn in memory of the dead, and so a reminder of death. That was a word which had power to make pretty butterfly Mrs. Hoare turn pale; a thought which, with all her real kindness of heart, her débonnaire generosity, her more than surface goodness, she could not bear to face.

And so she begged that Kitty, to please her, would cast aside her heavy black for one day, and then half blushing, and hesitating, she added, "Would Miss Lorton allow her to tell her maid to make up some pretty half-mourning dress, that would be light and cool for this hot summer weather?"

But Miss Lorton was very proud, and though she could not quite take offence—the offer was kindly made and delicately worded—she was very near doing so, and declined rather brusquely.

"If you desire it," she said, casting a sorrowful glance at her black, "I will find some other dress. I have some, made long ago, and scarcely worn."

Mrs. Hoare was too true a lady to press the subject any further; she made a slight apology for having mentioned it. "It was

only a prejudice of hers, and she hoped Miss Lorton would forgive her."

And so Kitty rummaged among her stock of half-forgotten dresses, all neatly folded up and put away when she went into mourning for her father, months ago, and selected a delicate white cambric, made of the softest and finest material, but in a fashion somewhat gone by. So it came to pass that Kitty stood before her glass one bright morning in the beginning of July, and put the finishing touches to her toilette, not without some slight satisfaction at the improvement in her own appearance. She had grown too pale for black lately, but she was fair enough and young enough to make the white dress infinitely becoming.

It was made very long and perfectly plain, and was remarkable for the absence of the furbelows, frills, and paniers which were then the fashion; only one deep flounce at the bottom of the skirt, edged with delicate lace, and frills on the tight sleeves and on the neck, and a broad black sash round her small waist, and a black ribbon encircling her throat. Her hair was all coiled up round her head, and shone brightly under her little round black hat. And such a refined,

delicate face it was underneath the hat; with great, sad, wide-apart eyes, and sensitive mouth—over pale perhaps for health or beauty, but wonderfully pure and sweet.

Kitty looked at herself in the glass, and thought that in spite of the improvement in dress she was wofully altered.

All her pretty bright colour had gone, all the *verve* and sparkle of former days, which had made her so bewitching, had fled. She did not know that in their place had come that which was infinitely better, but she could miss that which had gone—and sigh over it too.

For what woman, however sad she may be, however far apart from the world her life may have become, can reconcile herself, without a great many heart-pangs, to the loss of beauty?

Not Kitty Lorton, you may be sure—the vain little coquette, who had loved to feel the power of her fascinations. Once a coquette, always a coquette; and though circumstances had apparently blotted out this trait in her character, the vanity was there still, only it was lying dormant.

It was still sufficiently strong to make Kitty shrink from going into society in

which she must appear at a disadvantage. She pictured herself as she would appear among the crowd of gaily-dressed, fashionable *grandes dames*, and felt how strangely unlike them she would be in everything. How utterly alone among those who were all friends with each other but not with her.

Even Guy Lawrence, the only one of them all who had ever been her friend, would not be there. She had heard Mrs. Hoare regretting that 'Cousin Guy' could not come, and Kitty, in her heart, had guessed that he would not come because she would be there.

Was she sorry or glad? She scarcely knew. She felt sure that if he were there he would not speak to her; but she longed with a strange longing to see his face once more, though it could be only at a distance. For she felt now that more than a week had elapsed, and all vague hopes had died away, that he and she would never again meet as they had once met—stand together as they had once stood, hand to hand and soul to soul, with the consciousness of love in their hearts. As lovers, they would meet never more. Half tremblingly, yet with a proud, still face, Kitty went down into the

drawing-room with her dressed-out pupils, and stood among the crowd of gay people who were already assembled preparatory to a start, and after a few kind greetings from those who knew her, and some pleasant words from Mrs. Hoare, she shrank away into the background and tried to hide herself.

But she did not pass unnoticed. Most of the ladies were attired in the most picturesque costumes; and with their fanciful bright-coloured dresses, their floating ribbons, their short, flounced petticoats, their coquettish, flower-decked heads, formed a brilliant Watteau-like picture, in the background of which, Kitty, in her floating white dress, was strangely conspicuous for her unlikeness to them all.

She was acutely sensible of every one of the wondering glances that were cast in her direction, and felt sure that they were all disparaging: but in that she was mistaken. Picture to yourself one of the fair girls, whom Leslie delights to paint with such inimitable delicacy, standing among a group of Dresden china shepherdesses, and you will imagine the contrast she presented to those by whom she was surrounded.

Many eye-glasses, many admiring half-stares were directed to her corner, and brought a little pink flush to her pale cheeks that lent her the only charm she lacked, for she misinterpreted them all: she thought these people were quizzing her, and hated them in her heart for their rudeness.

What a relief it was when a move was made towards the carriages! The youngest of her little charges, a pretty, fair-haired mite, still clung timidly to Kitty's skirts, but at that moment with a sudden cry she let go her hold, and sprang towards the door, and Kitty, following her movements, saw the cause of her excitement. Guy Lawrence had entered the room, "Cousin Guy," the favourite of the children, whose advent was always hailed with the most exuberant delight, though he was generally so grave and quiet of late that it was difficult to discover wherein lay the attraction he possessed for them. But children in their attachments often show the same instinctive knowledge of character that dogs do. The best and most honest of men are generally marked out by them for their preference. There are, of course, children and children; as well as dogs and dogs. The dog who

measures his love by the size of the bone that is thrown to him; the child who values his elders according to the amount of sugar-plums and gifts bestowed upon him. But little innocent children—not those precocious monstrosities who are small men and women before they leave the nursery—often choose out for their devotion those who have no outward attraction. The world's veneer goes for nothing with them; fine clothes, false smiles, delicate affectations, are all thrown away upon them.

Men and women who are false and unreal may go bravely, unfearful of detection, among their fellow men and women, and they will shrink from the innocent scrutiny of a child's eyes.

It spoke well for Guy Lawrence that children always loved him. His face brightened into a smile as the little child pressed her way through the crowd, and placed her tiny hand in his large one, with a confiding grasp.

"Well, Mignonette," he said, looking tenderly down into the upturned face, "are you glad to see me?"

"O, Cousin Guy, we thought you wouldn't

come. I'm so glad. Mamma! Have you seen mamma?"

Mrs. Hoare turned round at the sound of the baby voice, and welcomed him with her ever ready smile.

"Guy! I am so pleased. So you have got back from Erlesmere? Bertie assured us you would not be here, and he himself has gone off to Lady Danvers' morning party—naughty boy!"

"I was obliged to go down a day or two on business. But I am detaining you, Clara. I'm afraid I am very late," answered Guy, rather abstractedly; for his eyes, wandering round the room, had fallen on what they sought—a little white-robed girl standing alone and looking miserably conscious of her loneliness.

He made his way across the room and held out his hand to her. He knew well how neglected she was feeling just then, and that it was no time to remember the estrangement which existed between them.

"How good of Guy!—so like him," thought Mrs. Hoare. "He always finds out the most friendless girl and takes care of her."

Poor little Kitty! How intensely shy she

felt as she looked up and met the grave, kind eyes bent on her; how miserably guilty and ashamed of herself! Perhaps Guy was conscious of her embarrassment, for he only spoke a few words to her, and then turned to a man who was standing near, ogling Kitty in the hope of an introduction. She seized her opportunity, and slipping away, encountered Mrs. Hoare, and found herself consigned to a carriage-full of strangers, with Mignonette perched on her lap.

She began to think that picnics were wretched mistakes. She took very small part in the chatter that went on in an endless stream between the two girls and an insipid youth, an ensign in the Guards, who had fallen to her lot as companions for the drive. She dreamily watched the passing objects, and speculated on the possibility of deriving any enjoyment from these sort of entertainments.

"Perhaps it is only that *les raisins sont verts*," she thought to herself. "Once I should have been wild with joy at the mere idea of a picnic. It is only that everything is different now; that I am not as other girls are. I have no friends—don't let me try to salve over the truth—I have no

attention paid to me, I am despised and neglected; that is why I hate these sort of things now."

Poor little girl! She was in the same mood when they had all alighted from the carriages and assembled at the hotel—when the bevy of gay ladies vanished upstairs to administer *poudre de riz* to their flushed cheeks and dainty finishing touches to their ruffled plumage; and the gentlemen lighted their cigars, looked up hampers of some pet wine, and quaffed copious draughts of brandy-and-soda.

She crept away through the wide-opened front door, and with a few swift steps found herself under the far-famed trees of Bushy Park. It was so hot and dusty and arid—the ground was strewn too with dirty newspapers and broken wine-bottles; and the air was noisy with coarse babble—not with the songs of birds—and was scented with the unmistakeable odour of dirty school-children and London holiday-makers, not with the delicate fragrance of summer flowers. Country-born Kitty turned up her nose at the ruralism of Cockneys. "*This* was what they called country. Bah! they had better keep to their sun-bleached

parks and dusty streets than make believe at Arcadian delights."

She was fretted and chafed by her own troubles. She was looking at everything through spectacles that cast a dim shadow over all the bright landscape, but little by little, as she wandered on under the shady trees, where the great destructive unwashed had not penetrated, her heart yielded to the gentle influences of the scene—the soft air, the universal gladness; the stillness soothed her into restfulness, and filled her with memories of the past.

She sat down to rest under a tree, and fell into a reverie which had lost half its bitterness, but was still tinged with that sort of *pitié de soi-même* which had become habitual to her in these days. She did not remain long in solitude. Merry voices, peals of laughter rang on the air—the picnicers were straying thither in search of a spot for their repast, and, as it always falls out somehow on these occasions, they had grouped themselves into couples, and were wandering tête-à-tête under the delicious shade of the overspreading trees.

But Kitty remained unnoticed; they all passed her by, unseeing, till little Migno-

nette spied the gleam of a white dress among the bushes, and leaping through them with airy footsteps, threw herself laughing and breathless among the folds of it.

"Oh, Miss Lorton, it's so nice! Why have you hidden yourself? Mamma wanted you; and they are all coming! Look! there's Mrs. Vane and papa, and there—see! there's Cousin Guy and Aunt Lily!"

Yes, there was Cousin Guy bending over the fairest of all Mrs. Hoare's fair sisters. What a pang of unreasonable jealousy shot through Kitty's heart as she saw him! What she had resigned herself, she could not willingly see become the property of another. And what a mean, poor love was this which he had pretended to feel for her—so easily forgotten, so lightly cast aside.

With all a woman's unreasonableness, she mentally condemned him as a male flirt, a would-be lady-killer, because she saw him leaning over a pretty girl; and she jumped up with a sudden scorn of herself that she had been making moan over the loss of this man's love—a man who was probably only capable of a passing tendresse for

every pretty face. She forgot the absurdity of her mental accusation, the improbability that he would ever have asked her to marry him had he not loved her. She remembered nothing but that he, looking tender admiration on soft blue eyes and golden hair, had passed her by unseen.

"Did you say your mamma was looking for me? Come, Mignonette, we will go to her," she said, with sudden energy.

"There she is," answered the child. "Come, let us run, Miss Lorton, and we shall catch her up."

And so they joined themselves to Mrs. Hoare, and Kitty threw aside her shyness, and with her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling, mingled in the throng.

A man who had been attentively observing her ever since her entrance into the drawing-room, and who had been fruitlessly asking "Who is she?" of all his friends, made his way to his hostess, and drawled out a request for an introduction to the young lady in white.

"If it isn't too much trouble. Really, I scarcely like to ask you to move a quarter of a yard this weather, it is so fatiguing."

"It's not the slightest trouble," answered

Mrs. Hoare; and with just the slightest hesitation, she gave the required introduction.

Kind as she was, it had never occurred to her possible that little Gerald Peake, one of the catches of the season, should desire to know her governess; and though she had no choice but to give the introduction now it had been asked for, she felt just a little piqued that he, the most fastidious and lazy of men, should be attracted by Kitty Lorton when he had not taken to either of her golden-haired sisters.

Moreover Gerry Peake had just come into an enormous fortune, and enterprising matrons were calculating on the chances of his marrying. Very small chances they were, if only they had known it—for little Gerry was an insatiable flirt, and never meant anything serious by the most desperate of his flirtations. Just twenty-seven, with nothing to do and more money than he could possibly spend, he had the run of all the boudoirs and drawing-rooms in London, and he made women his sole study and amusement, priding himself on the refinement of his taste and the discrimination he displayed in the selection of the fair ladies

whom he honoured with his passing attentions. "His only books were women's looks," and folly was indeed all they had taught him. And yet on the principle of doing only one thing, and doing it well, this man was, I suppose, successful.

Somehow or other he had gained a name as a tolerably good woman-critic. Men who were far cleverer and socially greater than himself, were apt to defer to his judgment in these matters, and his praise was often the groundwork of a woman's reputation as a beauty. His taste was unquestionably a pure and refined one, though you would scarcely have expected it from seeing the man himself; and he was very hard to please. Therefore it was that Mrs. Hoare raised her eyebrows in momentary though well-concealed astonishment, when Gerald Peake put himself out of his way to make the acquaintance of her little governess. Women are so apt to be blind, really and truly, not spitefully blind, to the beauty of their fellow-women; or rather, I should say, that which men find beautiful does not excite their admiration. Men's beauties and women's beauties are so proverbially different. If Mrs. Hoare had been asked

if Kitty was pretty, she would probably have replied, "She is rather nice-looking, poor little thing!" in that kind, would-not-be-disparaging way of hers, all the while genuinely believing that she was doing Kitty more than justice, instead of less. The little pale face, with its sad eyes, had no attractions for her, whose idea of the beautiful, was a brilliant tout ensemble of rosy cheeks, blue eyes, laughing lips, and golden hair.

But Gerald Peake found some wonderful charm in it. He threw himself by Kitty's side and waited on her with the most devoted attention, and seemed as if he would never tire of looking into her sweet dark eyes, and listening to her soft laughter and gay sallies.

Such a noise there was with the ceaseless chatter, the popping of champagne and soda-water. Kitty felt in a whirl with the unusual excitement; and the consciousness that Guy Lawrence, seated opposite, was casting momentary grave glances at herself and her companion, only made her the brighter and merrier.

She was but a bad actress, after all; a greater adept at the art would not have

overdone it as she did. Any one not blinded by love and growing jealousy, as Guy Lawrence was, would have learnt she was not indifferent to him, by the very care she took to prove that she was. As it was, he was condemning her much as she had condemned him—as a heartless flirt.

"I should like to go on eating strawberries and cream for ever, *comme ça.* What a pity it is life can't be all 'beer and skittles,' said Gerald Peake, in a sentimental tone; for champagne, sunshine, and soft coquettish glances were doing their work with him.

"I dare say we should get wondrously tired of it if it was. Even picnics—though I must confess they are delightful—would pall after a while," soliloquized Kitty.

"Yes: if we were condemned to eat our dinners for ever *al fresco* — sitting on straw, like Marjory Daw," said little Peake, with a glance at the temporary seats he had constructed for himself and Kitty from the débris of the hampers, "and to drink our champagne flavoured with earwigs, we might think it a bore. Half the things which we do now for amusement, if we were compelled to do them, we should

consider it an awful hardship. Have a peach, Miss Lorton?"

"Thank you," answered Kitty, looking contemplatively at the round soft fruit. "I suppose it is that I haven't brushed the bloom off my peach yet; I have scarcely tasted the sweetness of amusement, so I haven't tired of it."

"You have not been out much?" asked her companion, with languid curiosity. "Ah well, you will find that amusements, like peaches, lose their charm with their rarity. These June peaches are luxuries because they are scarce and costly, but we cease to care for them in August, when they are really far better and cost a tenth part of their present price. It is the same *partout*, peaches and picnics; you will find, Miss Lorton, both cease to please you when they have grown common, every-day affairs."

"This is likely to be my first and my last peach and picnic. So I mean to make the most of both," she answered, with the half-serious, half-mocking laugh which puzzled Gerald Peake.

"Haven't you come out? That accounts for my not having seen you anywhere in

town. I shall look forward with the greatest delight to the day when you will become one of us," he answered, looking admiringly at the little face, whose sweet childishness was to him its greatest charm. "I heard you were staying with Mrs. Hoare, but you don't appear even at her parties—how is that? Are they keeping you dark, like a young horse, that you may come out with a rush, and become first favourite?"

A deep crimson flush suffused the girl's face. She had for the moment forgotten her own station in society, and now she must confess it. She hated herself for the paltriness of a pride that made her ashamed of the truth—that made her shrink from the surprise which she knew this man would show when he heard who and what she was.

"I shall never come out. I have nothing to do with that sort of thing. I am only Mrs. Hoare's governess," she said, very quietly and proudly, looking at him steadily as she spoke.

Gerry Peake prided himself on his perfect tact and control over his own countenance, but even he could not quite subdue a

momentary look of astonishment at the idea that this girl, whom he had singled out as the prettiest and most distinguished-looking of Mrs. Hoare's guests, was only the governess; but he was, with all his faults, too true a gentleman to increase her embarrassment by word or manner.

The tone in which he answered was perfectly easy and unconstrained.

"Really, you look only a child yourself. I thought you were scarcely out of the school-room. You must pardon me if I haven't treated you with the distant respect befitting your advanced years."

Kitty laughed quite lightly again, and Gerald Peake exerted himself to be even more amusing than before To do him justice, he was quite above the smallness of valuing people according to their social position. A pretty girl was a pretty girl, to him, whether she was the descendant of a hundred earls or the daughter of a crossing-sweeper. It mattered little to him who she was, as long as she was refined. He did not affect pretty *paysannes;* but this girl was a lady, a thorough-bred little lady too, and the annoyance he had felt at hearing that she was not one of his own

order, arose purely from the fact that all hope of pursuing what promised to be a very pleasant flirtation was thereby nipped in the bud.

Kitty felt intensely grateful to him for his tact and kindness. She had grown to dread slights, to look out for them, and sometimes she imagined them when they had not been intended, and therefore appreciated the more the frank friendliness and kind attentions of this man, and she looked up at him with her eloquent eyes in a way that made Gerald Peake feel the task to which he had set himself, the endeavour to chase away the cloud which had fallen on her fair face, a very pleasant one.

He told little racy stories, repeated well-known bon-mots and jokes that were all new to Kitty, and listened with delight to the light *méchante* laughter which they elicited, sublimely unconscious that the man with the bronzed face opposite was inwardly condemning him as "an insane little humbug."

Somehow Kitty managed to bring down general disapprobation on her unfortunate little head before she arose from her seat of straw. Gerald Peake's attentions, and her

very warm reception of them, were the objects of unqualified censure.

"So very forward—would you believe it? Only a sort of nursery governess—great mistake to bring her here at all. Clara always does these sort of things—so quixotic and generous, you know," said an old aunt, all moiré antique and Honiton lace, regarding the offender through a double eye-glass with a supercilious scrutiny.

"She is but a child," replied the person whom she addressed—a man, of course. "It's only natural she should enjoy herself; I dare say it's quite an unusual excitement for her, poor little girl!"

But no pity did Kitty receive from the fairer portion of the party; even Mrs. Hoare opened her bright eyes in mild surprise. "It's always the way with those girls who seem so very quiet—still waters run deep."

So when they all rose up and went their several ways, Kitty found herself shunned by every one, and but for little Gerald Peake, who saw pretty well how the land lay and could not find it in his heart to desert her, she would have been absolutely forsaken.

"I think I must go," stammered Kitty,

when she found herself alone with him, one of a number of parties *à deux* that were strolling through the grounds of Hampton Court; "I must see after the children."

"No, you must not—the young 'uns are all right, they are on in front with Hoare—heard him promise to take them on the water, and you must let me stay with you while I can. It's an awful bore, but I'm due in town at eight. My sister gives a dinner, and would break her heart if I shirked it; but there's lots of time before. What shall we do?"

"I don't know—I don't care," she answered, constrainedly. All her excitement had faded now Guy Lawrence was no longer near to see her, and she began to remember what she had before been oblivious to: that this man, a stranger to her until to-day, might misinterpret her words and actions—that he must be thinking how flighty and foolish she was, that he might almost be excused for thinking her "fast."

She began to feel acutely the awkwardness of the situation in which, partly through her own fault, she found herself placed, and to long to hide herself away, anywhere, out of the sight of everybody.

"If there was only one girl of all the party who would not look coldly at me if I joined myself to her!—but there's not," she thought, bitterly.

The more *empressé* her companion became, the quieter and more subdued grew Kitty, till at last Gerald Peake began to think she was not half such good fun as he had at first thought her.

Under the dark screen of the old trees that grew round the house where kings once held their revelry and whispered their love—through the dim ancient passages, out again into the burning sun, Kitty followed unresistingly, knowing not how to make her escape; but at length she paused.

"Will you excuse me?" she said, lifting up her beseeching eyes to his face. "I think I will find my way back to the hotel. My head aches with the glare of the sun, and Mrs. Hoare may want me — may wonder where I am."

"I was going to take you on the river; see, it is only a few steps further, and it will do your head good—there is a breeze on the water. I am afraid you have been walking too much. Is it very bad?"

He spoke with such kind solicitude that she looked at him gratefully.

"Not very; you are very kind—but I think I'd rather not go."

Gerald Peake thought that he divined the cause of her hesitation—that it arose from a reluctance to go with him alone—and he was silent for a minute, till a turn in the road brought them in full sight of the river and of a party of people arranging themselves for a start. Kitty drew back—she had no wish to be seen or to go amongst those who did not want her—but it was too late.

"Hullo, Peake!" cried a voice from the boat. "You're just the fellow we want. Come and make up our crew. Come along, Miss Lorton; plenty of room."

But Kitty shook her head.

"You go, please," she said, looking at her companion; "I want to go back. Tell Mr. Hoare I have a headache, and dread the sun."

Gerald Peake went to the water's edge and explained to his host the cause of their hesitation. Mr. Hoare jumped on shore and went up to Kitty.

"Come along, Miss Lorton; the air will do you good, and you shall keep quiet and

rest—you look very tired. Here's Mignonette in despair because she had lost you."

He took her hand kindly as he spoke and helped her into the boat. It was a large one, and the party consisted of himself and Guy Lawrence, the two children, and their pretty aunt, Lily Ransford. There was just room to squeeze Kitty into the stern, and Gerald Peake pulled off his coat and took an oar.

Out on the water, floating gently with the tide, the cool air fanning her heated face, resting quietly with her eyes wandering dreamily over the still summer landscape, there fell on her a sort of calm, which even the consciousness of Guy Lawrence's presence could not destroy. Glad enough to follow the general advice and keep quiet, she listened wearily to the monotonous swish of the oars, and looked down into the clear depths of the water in a dreamy restfulness, in which the minutes passed unnoticed, scarcely hearing the gay chatter and the merry laughter, seldom speaking herself, till her reverie was broken by the grating of the boat on the shore, and Gerald Peake jumped out.

"Good-bye, Miss Lorton; I must make haste to catch my train. I hope your head will be better soon."

And with a feeling of relief she heard him make his adieux to the others, and saw him turn away and disappear in the distance.

"How much farther are we going, papa?" asked Mignonette, raising her golden head from its resting-place in Kitty's lap.

"Only back to the landing-place, *petite*, and then we must go and see after mamma."

Kitty sighed. They must go back then to the crowd of people, whom with her present consciousness of general condemnation, she felt ashamed to face.

She glanced at Guy. How grave, and quiet, and stern, he looked. She knew that he was condemning her too.

Poor little Kitty! If she had been silly, it was certain that her shame and contrition were disproportionate to her offence.

When Guy jumped from the boat and lifted out the two children, Kitty, who was nearest, drew back, and golden-haired Lily held out her hand for his assistance, and sprang lightly on shore.

"I've robbed the water of its fairest lily," he said, with a smile, and then he turned and waited with outstretched hand for Kitty.

She pushed it angrily aside, but as her foot was on the gunwale and she prepared to jump ashore, the boat suddenly lurched and destroyed her balance; recovering herself in some degree, she made a spring, but in the fright she misjudged the distance, and touching the shore at a spot where it sloped abruptly, her foot slipped, and she sank to the ground with a low cry of pain.

Only Guy heard it, for the others had moved on; but at the sound all his anger was forgotten, and he bent over her tenderly and raised her up.

"It is nothing," she said, disengaging herself from his grasp. "Only—my foot. I'm all right." But her white lips and quivering face belied her words.

"You have hurt yourself," he said very gravely. "Is it your foot?"

"Yes, I turned it a little—only a little. I can walk now."

He did not answer her or offer her his help again, but he looked down on her

with a pained, grieved look, as she wilfully persisted in trying to walk unaided.

She had sprained her ankle, and each time she attempted to put her foot to the ground, her brow contracted and she set her teeth with the pain. Desperate with the dread of being left alone with Guy Lawrence, and the knowledge that in spite of all her efforts each minute increased the distance between herself and the others, she nerved herself with a terrible energy to overcome the deadly faintness that was creeping over her, and to hide her agony from him. The view became indistinct, the trees danced confusedly before her eyes, each limb trembled convulsively, and she felt half suffocated with the attempt to keep back the moans which came to her lips. She tried to calculate the distance to the hotel. What a weary, interminable road it seemed to her, when each step was terrible torture! Every moment the pain grew worse. She saw the last gleam of Lily Ransford's dress as it disappeared round a corner, and then all the bright landscape became a blurred mass, a terrible chaos of misery and pain; she looked wildly round her, as if with

dumb instinct, she sought some friendly hand held out to support her. She turned on Guy an imploring, helpless look of agonized entreaty. She stretched out her hands towards him, and, with a low cry, tottered forward. He caught her in his arms, and as he clasped her to him, heard the half-uttered words that were dying on her lips.

"Oh, Guy, Guy——"

His own name — only that — spoken lovingly, entreatingly, with such a yearning wistfulness, as she fell back unconscious.

He looked down on the little white face that lay on his shoulder in death-like stillness, and tried in vain to still the tumult in his heart. Was it only his fancy that made him think there was entreaty for forgiveness in her words, and in her looks an unconscious confession of a love she had denied?

He unfastened the little black hat, and pushed back the sunny rippling hair from her cold white brow. The childish face that lay so close to his own, in the trustfulness of utter helplessness, stirred all his pulses with the fever of a passion that was hard to control, but he raised her in his

arms with the tender respectfulness of a man who touches a sacred thing, though his very tenderness was almost a caress.

He carried her gently in his arms as he would have carried a sleeping child; but all the while he looked down on the cold white face with a terrible longing to kiss the lips he loved so well.

"My darling, my darling," he muttered, unconsciously clasping her closer to him, as he hurried forward with steps scarcely impeded by his burden.

He would fain have lingered by the way—it was such utter joy to hold her in his arms—to feel that for the moment she was his, and his alone. He felt as he looked down on the death-like calm of her face, that he would rather hold her so—dead—than see her, as he had seen her a few hours ago, in the fulness of health and beauty, coquetting with another.

As he paused for a moment under the deep shadow of the heavy trees, and gazed at her, he felt as if he were in a cruelly-sweet dream—one of those semi-trances, in which even while we dream we know that it is but a dream; we retain a consciousness of the wakening that must come,

and fear to move lest we should break the spell.

He was but mortal, and the desire to snatch her to his heart and cover her face with passionate kisses, struggled for a moment with the loyalty which forbade him to take the smallest advantage of her unconsciousness. It was but for a moment, and then again he hurried on at his utmost speed. Through the gloom, out into the light, past the group of men assembled at the hotel door, he bore his senseless burden, neither heeding their remarks nor answering their questions; never pausing till he laid her down on a couch, and then with one long lingering look he turned and left her.

He stood at the door of the room, keeping guard like a sentinel over her, refusing entrance to those who, in their curiosity, would have crowded round the fainting girl, until Mrs. Hoare came in answer to his message, and then with a few words of explanation he gave Kitty into the care which could do more for her than his could, and making his cousin promise to send for him should his help be needed, went away by himself.

He waited outside the hotel until the sun sank behind the clouds and the swift-coming twilight was wrapping the earth in a veil of grey mistiness. Only the sound of dance-music and of merry laughter broke the stillness of the evening, and a cool breeze sprang up and fanned his heated face. But he heard nothing, felt nothing, but the sound of an entreating voice murmuring, "Guy — Guy;" and the pressure of two tiny outstretched hands.

His heart and brain were in a tumult—the tumult of renewed hope.

He did not see Kitty again until the carriage was summoned that was to take her home. He helped to carry her to the door almost in silence, but as he stooped to arrange the cushions, he bent his head, and looked into the small white face, almost tenderly. "You are better now?" he asked.

"Oh yes, so much; but I can never thank you. Will you forgive me for—for *all* the trouble I've caused you?"

She spoke tremblingly, almost imploringly—and for a moment their eyes met.

What was there in that look to set both their hearts beating? A confession of love—a prayer for forgiveness — regret for the past — hope for the future?

Whatever it may have been, the remembrance of it lingered with both of them long after they had parted, and the carriage, with its spanking horses and bright lights, throwing a strange flickering gleam on the girl's pale face, had borne her away into the distance.

Kitty, leaning back on her cushions, and looking out into the bright starlit evening, felt a vague happiness, a sense of tranquillity, to which, in her constant fretting against her fate, she had long been a stranger. She fell into a waking dream of what might yet be; of a time when Guy Lawrence, no longer cold and hard, but loving and gentle as he had been to-night, would listen to a confession from her reluctant, trembling lips, of a love which she had cruelly and falsely denied.

In the darkness and silence—for her only companion, a used-up old lady, who had been willing enough to retire early from the festive scene, and take Kitty in her

carriage to town, had fallen into the sleep of the just—the girl lay still and dreamed her happy dreams; till the quiet beauty of the summer evening, the sense of thankfulness, filled her eyes with sudden tears, and clasping her hands, her lips half-formed a prayer that God would yet grant her this great happiness, ill-deserved though it was.

Knowing that Guy loved her, was it wrong that she should pray that He, in His great goodness, would grant that their two lives might yet be brought together, never to be sundered—never to be separated through life—unto death?

And Guy stood by the hotel door, and watched the carriage till it disappeared; then he turned, and went out into the darkness under the trees, and made his way alone to the station.

He was in no mood to face a crowd, or to drive home with any one. He preferred solitude. There was no tranquillity for him—his brain was in a whirl; an intangible joy, a half-realized hope, had upset the calm to which he had through much suffering attained; and again he was mocked by the delusive will-

o'-the-wisp dreams of supreme joy, which always fled from him ere he grasped them.

In vain he tried to break the spell which had fallen on him, to persuade himself of the unreality of these dreams, the impossibility of any hope existing still, when she on whose truth he would have staked his honour, had denied that she loved him. They would haunt him, and fill him with a feeling of elation. Undefined, unreal though his hopes might be; built as they were on a few half-conscious words, on an imploring look, a momentary softening of manner, they had power to scare away the moody depression that had taken hold of him, and to make him suddenly light-hearted.

Bearing the heavy burden of his own troubles, which during the last week had seemed almost greater than he could bear, Guy had shrunk from society, and had hidden himself away in the country; but now he began to think that in doing so he had almost shirked the duty which he had imposed upon himself, of watching over Bertie, and placing himself between him and danger, and had neglected to follow up

the advantage he had gained at the supper-party.

When Guy reached Waterloo, he jumped into a Hansom, and looking at his watch, told the man to drive to Curzon Street.

## CHAPTER VII.

ESTELLE the actress had not been in quite her usual "form" that night. She had been depressed, *ennuyée;* and though the public could see no fault in its favourite, she herself had been conscious that her acting had been almost tame, and wanting in its usual spirit.

Now she stood by the window, playing with the lace of the curtain, and looking up and down the street. Her usual languor seemed to have departed from her, and she was possessed with an unrestfulness very foreign to her ordinary manner.

She turned impatiently and looked up into the handsome face bent over her.

"You have the gift of silence to-night, *amico mio*," she said.

"How can I speak, when you forbid me to open my lips on the one subject which fills my heart and brain?" her companion

answered, almost sadly. "How can I look at you, be near you, speak to you, without speaking of love?"

"Forbidden fruit, Bertie," she answered, with a mocking smile, "is always the sweetest. If I bade you speak to me of love, always love, nothing but love, you would soon grow weary of the same old story."

"Try me," he answered, with an earnestness which contrasted strangely with the lightness of her tone. "Give me the right to speak to you for ever of my love, and you will find that I can never exhaust the endless theme. Give me but the right, and I will prove to you by every act of my life, my boundless, passionate devotion."

He paused for a moment, but she never spoke. She only watched him with the cruel curiosity of a child watching a moth writhe in torture on the pin with which he has pierced it.

"The days of chivalry are past," he continued. "We do not die of love, or for love, now. We cannot fling away our lives in honour of the 'faire ladye' whose colours we wear; if we did, we should only

get laughed at for our pains. But I am always dreaming of you, thinking of you; foolish dreams and thoughts, all of them; and sometimes I picture you to myself as 'La belle dame sans merci,' and myself as your knight, rescuing the glove you had thrown from your dainty hand among the lions. But there I end the story. I could not fling it back into your face—I could only go away, and——" He broke off suddenly, with a strange horror on his face. She was standing out on the balcony, leaning a little forward, and gazing down into the darkness underneath. It seemed almost as if, with the force of a vivid imagination, she was picturing the scene to herself, for a slow, half-triumphant smile curled her full lips, and a hard, cruel light gleamed in her great, panther-like eyes, half hidden, half revealed by the drooping lids. Such a strange resemblance she bore at that moment to the cold, cruel beauty who, in Leighton's picture, "Habet," holds down her white thumb as the death-warrant of a human creature, that Bertie Deverell involuntarily shrunk from her.

"Celia!" he exclaimed under his breath, "I sometimes think if I did not love

you so intensely, I could almost hate you."

She smiled at his words. She knew so well that they were but a fresh proof of her own power. None knew better than she how to read a man's heart; and the hatred which fell to her lot as a necessary consequence of her brilliant career, was as sure a tribute to her vanity as the love. "Fiercest love makes fiercest hate"—one was as acceptable as the other.

"I am an actress," she said, as her face resumed its usual careless expression. "For a moment I imagined myself as the heroine of your bygone romance. You are a foolish boy to take everything *au grand sérieux*."

"It's a fault I shall probably grow out of,"—answered Bertie, turning to light a cigarette; "I shall soon grow cold and frivolous and cruel under *your* tuition."

The sudden glare of the fusee fell on his worn, haggard face, and revealed it to a man who at that moment dashed up in a Hansom.

To Guy Lawrence that glimpse of his brother's face was a sudden recall to the realities of life from the unrealities of the

over-sweet dreams in which he had been indulging during the drive from the station.

All the elation of spirit which he had felt since he had held Kitty in his arms and caught the half-uttered words that sprang to her lips in the moment of her weakness, fled from him, as again he realized that his mission in life was to suffer, not to enjoy; to help others, not himself; and that it remained unfulfilled while Bertie's fate was hanging in the balance.

His face was grave enough as he joined the two who stood in the balcony.

"I must ask you to excuse me for the lateness of my visit," he said, as he held Celia's hand and looked down into her beautiful face; "I only returned to town to-day, and could not come here before"—and then he turned, and held out his hand to his brother.

Bertie took it for a moment carelessly, never meeting Guy's eyes, for he could not take his own from Celia's face.

He watched with a scowl the rich flush that had sprung to her brow, which all her artifice could not conceal; and when he spoke, his voice was very low and quiet,

but there was a malicious light in the blue eyes that never moved themselves from the fair face opposite to him.

"You are ubiquitous, *mon frère.* I met Bentham coming out of the Opera. He had been to Clara's picnic, cut the dancing, and arrived in time to see the new ballet. By-the-bye, Rosine is a splendid thing in danseuses."

"You were speaking of Bentham—weren't you," interrupted Guy.

"Yes, or rather of you. He told me, when he last saw you, you were carrying a fair damsel in your arms—she had fainted or gone into hysterics, or something, when you were alone with her on the water. Quite a romance—wasn't it? Wont you give us the full, true, and particular account of the whole affair? and to begin with, who was she?" said Bertie, still watching Celia.

She had turned and was looking at Guy, as if she waited for his answer.

"One whom I don't choose should become the subject of your jests," he said with marked coldness and severity.

"*Pardon,*" sneered Bertie. "I did not know it was a tender subject."

All the while his eyes were fixed with the same malicious intentness on Celia's face; but she knew that he was watching her, and she was too perfect an actress to lose command of her features. The smile never left her lips, the light never faded from her eyes, the fair, proud face that was revealed by the fitful glare of the street-lamps, was just as calm, and gay, and brilliant as ever; but as she read in Guy's face, or thought she read, some trace of the feeling that he had for another woman, she shivered from head to foot.

Guy looked down at her.

"You are cold—wont you come in?"

She drew her delicate laces over her bare white shoulders.

"Only a sudden chill. Your English summer days are treacherous—as yourselves."

"Not so treacherous as Italian eyes and Italian skies, that charm us while they slay us. Who, revelling in the glory of your radiant summer, dreams of malaria? who, looking into deep, passionate eyes, thinks of danger?"

"I think I would rather be burnt than [illegible] Is it not better to be passionate

than cold?" she answered him, her great eyes lighting up with a sudden fire.

There was a moment's pause, for Guy, lost in a reverie over the strange contradictions of the nature of this woman, whom men called cold, did not speak. Then she turned to Bertie, who had left the balcony, and now returned with a soft white shawl, and thanked him, as he wrapped it over her shoulders, with a radiant smile, which almost dissipated the gloom which had fallen over his face.

"You are always thoughtful, Bertie," she said in a low, caressing voice.

"That wasn't my old character, was it, Guy? He and I were always like the good and naughty boys in the story-books. Ever since I was in short frocks, he has been held up to me as a model of all I ought to be."

"I always liked the naughty boys the best," said Celia; "the good ones were so oppressive."

"But the naughty ones always came to grief—were hanged or eaten up by lions or something. I suppose *I* shall. I wonder who'd care?"

Both his companions looked at him as he

spoke. Guy, who was leaning against the stonework of the house, fixed his eyes on him with a strange yearning wistfulness, and Celia raised hers with a glance which said as plainly as any words, "You know I should."

Bertie spoke again presently in his usual gay way. His spirits, always variable, seemed suddenly heightened, his depression all gone.

"Though you abuse our climate, *bella donna*," he said, lightly, "this weather appears to me divine. It is a sin and a shame to waste such an evening as this in the streets of London. How awfully nice it would be on the water at Richmond."

"Yes, it was very pleasant on the water to-day," said Guy, dreamily.

Celia darted a swift glance at him.

"I should like to go to some of those places, but I am a slave," she said pettishly.

"Throw over the theatre, and let me drive you down to Richmond to-morrow; it is to be the first appearance of our new team. We will dine at the Star and Garter," said Bertie, eagerly.

She shook her head.

"Isn't it a rather risky thing to drive a lady behind an untried team?" said Guy, almost abruptly, waking up from the reverie into which he had fallen.

"I said it was the first appearance of these horses. We have of course tried them before," answered Bertie, quietly. "They are some Leath and I picked up. Very good, quiet sort of cattle, trained to the Park and that kind of thing, but not bad ones to drive."

If Guy had wished to prevent Celia from driving down to Richmond with Bertie, he should have been wiser than to oppose the scheme; for in the mood that she was then in, his opposition was the only thing needed to make her consent.

The idea having once entered Bertie's head, he was wild to carry it out, and overcame all her objections; even consented to the presence of the sheep-dog, and to the party being increased to ten people—all irreproachable and desirable in their different ways, though he would willingly have dispensed with their company on this occasion — and the thing was arranged.

"It cannot be to-morrow—say the day after; I must make arrangements with Mr. Davison. Of course he'll make a fuss, but I will manage him," said Celia.

"Then I will ask the other people. Guy, you will be one, of course—that is *bien entendu*," said Bertie, as leaving the balcony, they entered the room where Mrs. Robarts, nodding over her lace-work, reigned in dignified solitude.

"No thank you, Bertie, I cannot come."

"Nonsense, Guy—you must," cried Bertie, in universal good-humour with all the world. "We cannot do without you."

A cloud fell over Celia's face when she heard Guy was not coming, and for a moment her anger melted.

"Do come," she said in a low voice, as she held his hand, when he was saying "Good-bye."

"Don't ask me," he said; "I can't, Bertie, are you going my way? if so, we can walk together."

"Yes, in a moment."

Guy left the room, and paused on the staircase to light a cigarette. Bertie lingered behind.

"Make your brother come; it will look better for you—and me. He is so much older, you know," whispered Celia; "and he will take all the trouble while we can—enjoy ourselves."

The dangerous tenderness of her manner completely disarmed all Bertie's suspicions; the coupling of her own name with his intoxicated him with hope; the soft emphasis which she had laid on the last words deluded him with the idea that she was anticipating the enjoyment of being alone with him, and only desired Guy's presence that they—he and she—might be more free to enjoy themselves. What wonder that he felt as if he would have promised anything and everything she could ask, and completely forgot his previous jealousy of his brother.

Meanwhile Guy, waiting for him, had repented of the momentary anger which had made him refuse to be one of the projected party.

Coming straight from sweet, pale-faced Kitty to this woman, whose very beauty was almost repulsive to him when he contrasted it with the purity and tenderness of the little English maiden, he had found it

impossible to appear the same as he had appeared to Celia on the night of the supper-party. Brilliant as she was there was something *bizarre* and strange about her which repelled him, and on this night he had not been able to make his manner to her anything but cold and politely distant, while she, stung by the alteration in him, haunted by an instinctive jealousy of this unknown woman, who had power to make Guy's eyes darken with sudden wrath because she had been made the subject of a jest, had repaid him coldness for coldness, and kept all her softness for Bertie, even practised her dangerous witcheries upon him under Guy's very eyes: till he, disgusted, refused to have any part in an excursion which could only entangle his brother more inextricably in her power.

But now, as he stood alone, he repented his impatience. What mattered it whether this woman disgusted or pleased him? On the night of the supper-party he had believed, fully believed, that Celia loved him, and he had resolved that the power which chance had placed in his hands should, failing all other means, be used to save his brother.

Sadly, remorsefully enough, he had come to this resolution; but how had he carried it out?

He who called himself brave, and had sworn that he would be faithful to his vow at any cost, had shirked his duty; and because his own heart was sore with grief, had hidden himself away out of sight, neglecting to follow up the advantage he had gained over the woman who, by a strange fate, had become his adversary in this mortal combat. More than that, he had been impatient and wounded her—driven her, as it were, into Bertie's arms. How bitterly he accused himself and condemned his own weakness; how firmly he resolved that no personal feeling should again make him shrink from the part which he must play in this life drama.

In the midst of these reflections, Bertie, full of gaiety and wild with a reckless excitement he could not hide, dashed down the stairs and joined him, and before they separated it had been arranged that Guy should make one of the projected Richmond party.

* * * * *

It was a brilliant July day; the sun

seemed never weary of shining in the cloudless sky, and shone unceasingly on the just and on the unjust, on the happy and on the sorrowful—on the rich, finely clothed, luxurious pleasure-seekers—on the poor, half-starved, meagre toilers, who hustled each other, and lived so close to each other, and yet were as far apart as the heavens are from the earth, in the strange *mêlée* of London life.

Kitty Lorton, sitting on the back seat of a carriage drawn up outside a shop in Knightsbridge, waiting patiently while Mrs. Hoare made her innumerable purchases, for the first time really enjoyed a glimpse of the fashionable world. She still felt that she was a very small and insignificant atom in it, but she was a happier atom than she had been, and not so much inclined to envy the others.

They had made much of her, and petted her, since her accident, and she liked that; and moreover while she had been lying on the sofa that morning, Guy Lawrence had come in and paid them a visit, and he had spoken to her kindly, almost tenderly. A small thing to make her happy, perhaps, but it was only such a little while ago that,

in her loneliness and desolation, she had felt that she was man-forgotten, almost God-forgotten, and now that she began to believe that there was still some one in the world who loved her, it seemed to her that she could scarcely be glad or grateful enough; and though she would not confess it to herself, she had some secret source of happiness, some hidden hope, that tinged all things with a new brightness, which, though she did her best to overcome it and keep it down, would surge up and fill her with a strange glad tumult, and a vague sense of a happiness she could not repress.

As they drove through the Park she could almost have cried out and clapped her hands, in her childish enjoyment of the gaiety and novelty of the scene; but a timely remembrance of the gravity and decorum befitting a governess kept her quiet, and she sat very still, watching everything with bright, sparkling eyes, and a little smile hovering round her lips.

She was almost glad when the carriage drew up before the shop, and Mrs. Hoare and Lily Ransford went in and left her sitting there alone. She did not care how long she waited. She liked to watch the

crowds of gay carriages whirling past her, the never-ceasing stream of happy, busy people.

Poor little Kitty! This bright, transient gleam of happiness was destined to be crushed out very quickly. Even as she sat there smiling and light-hearted, the evil fate that was to take the sunshine out of her life for ever, was coming towards her.

A drag, with four bright-coloured bays with glittering, clinking harness, a crowd of gaily-dressed people on the roof, and a man in a light overcoat with a cigarette in his mouth, driving the spirited quartette with the easy nonchalance of a practised whip.

"Oh, what a beautiful woman!" thought Kitty, her attention attracted by the most conspicuous figure of all the group—a woman who sat on the box-seat.

She was beautiful indeed. She sat on her lofty throne like a queen; one hand carelessly dangled the little lace-covered toy she called a parasol, down by her side; and her face, exposed to the full glare of the afternoon sun, dazzled the girl who looked at her for the first time, by its radiance; the other hand was laid half-

caressingly on the arm of the man who was driving, and she was looking up at him appealingly. His head was bent down so close to hers that for a moment Kitty did not see his face; but they came nearer, and she started so violently that she nearly jumped off her seat, her fingers clenched themselves unconsciously together, and her heart seemed to surge up into her throat and suffocate her. Could it be? Ay, there couldn't be much doubt about it. The man with the dark face, and deep-set eyes fixed so intently on the fair face that was so close to his own, that he never even saw her—the girl whom he had tried to delude with his false love-making, was — Guy Lawrence!

They passed like a flash of light; she never even saw that Bertie was sitting close behind, and they neither of them saw her; and when they had gone she sat cowering and shaking under the shade of her parasol, feeling absolutely dazed.

Everything seemed to be going round and round with her. The gay crowd rolled and bustled past just as it had done before; but, somehow, it had all changed, and to her dim, bewildered eyes, it seemed only

like a great, moving, meaningless panorama, in which all the figures were blurred and indistinct.

Nothing was plain to her but the fact that she had seen Guy Lawrence, as he had never intended her to see him, and by chance, by accident, had discovered a new phase of the treachery whereof he was capable. Blind jealousy—instinct—whatever you please to call it—convinced her that he was false to the love he had professed to feel for her. Only a fortnight ago he had poured out protestations of love to her. Had this other woman—this radiant, glorious creature already taken her place, and won the heart she had refused? or had he, who had deceived her once, poor trusting child, only been trying to deceive her again, when he would have made her believe in his love? Only that very morning he had looked and spoken to her—ah! she would not think of it. She dug her small fingers into the palms of her hands and bit her lip at the mere remembrance of it.

Did there ever exist a girl who would not have been rather amazed and very jealous at beholding the man whom she

imagined to be her own lover, under the circumstances that Kitty Lorton beheld Guy Lawrence? And Kitty was unversed in the ways of the world, so the bare facts that she had seen with her own eyes seemed to her very conclusive; more so than they would have seemed to another, better skilled in the knowledge of mankind.

By a violent effort she mastered her agitation, and tried to appear the same as usual when Mrs. Hoare and her sister came back to the carriage; but she had a terrible struggle to keep up and answer their questions, and she felt as if the change in her must be visible to them: her mind was in such confusion that the few observations she was called upon to make were made terribly *à tort et à travers.*

They drove on into the Park, and drew up by the rails under the shade of the trees. Very soon two or three men collected round the carriage to gossip with its pretty occupants; and Kitty sat silently on her back seat, listlessly unconscious of all that was passing around her.

"Saw one of your cousins just now, as I came into the Park, Miss Ransford," said a tall, soldier-like man, leaning on the car-

riage door. "He was on a drag—his own, I think."

Kitty's attention was instantly arrested, and she listened eagerly, almost breathlessly.

"By the bye, is there any truth in the report that he is going to marry that actress?"

"We never listen to reports, Colonel Temple," put in Mrs. Hoare, rather hurriedly, before her sister could answer—for she knew—what Kitty, poor, miserable Kitty, did not know—that this man was speaking of Bertie. The rumour had already reached her ears in some vague form, and she was anxious it should not be repeated.

"Oh! it is only a report, is it? I began to think there must be something in it, as he's always about with her. Speaking of actresses, what do you think of Rosine?" And then they drifted off into other themes, and not a word more reached the girl who was listening with a death-like chill at her heart and a faint numb feeling creeping over her, as if her pulses had suddenly stopped.

In after times, when Kitty tried to re-

call that scene, she could never remember all that she felt and suffered. She was stunned with the sudden weight of misery that had fallen on her. She had a dim remembrance of kind faces bending over her, of kind voices asking "if she felt ill—she looked white and tired"—of trying to make some excuse—of being driven home, and feeling sick and faint when she tried to walk—of being half-carried upstairs and laid on her bed, and of lying there alone, and coming gradually back to the consciousness of all she had heard.

And as thought and memory crept back to her, they brought with them no violent paroxysm of grief; a sort of dull, apathetic misery seemed to have fallen on her, numbing heart and brain. She lay there looking dreamily before her; and her great eyes, full of dumb sorrow, seemed to be gazing onwards into the miserable, hopeless blank of life that lay stretched out before her. She did not weep or moan over her troubles—she lay quite still, and suffered and felt like one whose last hope in life is extinct.

Was her sorrow disproportionate to the cause? It might seem so, but she had been

deceived once and could not trust again. She had tried to believe in Guy Lawrence's love; slowly, almost reluctantly, she had been bringing herself to credit the possibility of his truth; but her faith in him had only been a doubting, wavering faith at the best, and it had been utterly destroyed by this one blow.

It seemed so incredible, so impossible to believe, after all that had passed, that he loved her; but he had done much to convince her, and for the last few days she had been beginning to feel convinced, and to build up bright hopes for the future. Now they were all destroyed. Now she knew that he had only tried to deceive her a second time; that but for her firmness in denying that she loved him, he would again be able to laugh at her and pity her. There was one consolation left to her: she had not betrayed herself. He would never know that in saying she did not love him, she had not told the truth.

The apathy of despair gave way to an overwhelming feeling of anger, to a fiercer desire for revenge. In an agony of passion she clasped her hands and prayed for oblivion of the past, for indifference to the

future; prayed—though she was little in the mood for prayer—that she might learn to forget. She had said truly that the trustfulness of past days was gone from her. She knew as she lay there, the slow hot tears trickling through the fingers that tried to hide her white face from the glaring, mocking sunshine, that all trust, all hope was gone out of her life for ever, and that nothing was left to her but to suffer silently—so silently that none should ever know her misery or her foolish love.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MEANWHILE the gay party driving down to Richmond on Bertie Deverell's drag, went on their way unconscious of the sensation they had created.

For a short time after starting, Guy had taken the reins, Bertie being anxious for his opinion of the new team; but he soon resigned his seat and Bertie took his place, sending the horses along at a pace that speedily brought them to their destination. It was a brilliant little party that held revel in one of the rooms of the Star and Garter, overlooking the river; but fairest of the fair ones there assembled, most brilliant of the brilliant, shone the queen of the evening, the celebrated Estelle. Envied by the women, adored by the men, she was in her glory; there needed but one thing to make her triumph complete—and

that one thing—did she feel that it was almost within her grasp?

Never had her glorious eyes glowed with a softer light, or her perfect face been more radiant than on this evening; but not one of her tender glances, her low-murmured speeches were for the golden-haired boy who sat on her right hand, who would willingly have laid down life and honour at her feet; they were all reserved for the grave-faced man who set no value on her favour or her love, except as a means of gaining power over her.

The task which Guy Lawrence had set himself was terribly distasteful to him. He would not have thought much of flirting and trifling with this woman, knowing her for what she was—a vain, ambitious coquette; but doing it in cold blood, for a reason and a purpose, feeling no pleasure, no warmth in the homage he tried to pay her, only miserably conscious of his own falseness to her, was repugnant to him. After all, was it not doing evil that good might come? But the good was for Bertie. He had told himself he would do anything to save his brother. He would not shirk this duty; but rather, having made up his

mind that it was to be done, would do it effectually.

Some of the brilliance and gaiety of former days seemed to come back to him as the hours wore on. He was in reality more light-hearted than he had been for a long time, for he had seen Kitty that day—only seen her in his cousin's presence, lying pale and quiet on a sofa—but it had seemed to him, though she had scarcely spoken, there had been a tenderness in her manner which almost justified him in hoping to win back her love, and he felt that it was easier to be gay now the future was not quite so dark.

Moreover he was a man, and not above the weaknesses of mankind. What man, looking down on the glorious beauty by his side, and reading the tenderness for himself in her passionate southern eyes, would feel for long that it was a hard matter to simulate tenderness or to feel a real attraction to so lovely a woman? Guy warmed to his task. "La Belle Sorcière" tried her subtlest witcheries upon him, and wove her spells around him, till for the moment he almost forgot the unreality of his love-making and remem-

"Come into the garden, Celia," whispered Bertie, drawing her hand into his arm, when they had all risen from the table and were standing in groups, looking out into the twilight.

She drew her hand away with a look of intense weariness.

"No, I will stay here," she answered, throwing herself on a low couch, close to an open window.

Bertie, excited with wine, scarcely noted for a moment the coldness of her manner; but Guy, standing a little way off, bit his lip with anger to think that any woman should dare to treat his brother so.

"You wont come with me, Celia? You forget that you promised——"

Celia looked up with a passion in her face which, for some reason, she no longer cared to control. Did she think that the other man's love was so nearly her own that she could afford to let this one go?

"I have made no promise to you—of any sort," she said, with bitter emphasis; "and if I had," she added with a light laugh, "are you so deluded, *mon ami*, as to trust to women's promises?"

"I was a fool to trust to yours," he

said, turning from her with a fierce pain in his heart—and he went out into the darkness alone, with the sound of her mocking laughter still ringing in his ears.

Guy looked after him very sorrowfully. The momentary attraction that he had felt for Celia vanished; he felt, as he stood there, that he hated her—not only on account of her cruelty, but because of her he was obliged to be false to himself. But he was glad that she herself had shown Bertie how little she loved him. Surely now it would not be so hard to make him believe the truth? Painful as it was to Guy to see him suffer, he tried to rejoice at that which he thought must be for his brother's ultimate good. It was the old story of the disease and its remedy—the sharper the knife the more effective the cure. But it was hard on him, very hard, that it should be his hand that must guide the knife; that he, who would have sacrificed anything for Bertie, must seem so false, as if he were supplanting him in the affections of the very woman against whom he had warned him. Guy groaned to himself when he reflected how he must appear in Bertie's eyes—how false, how dishonour-

able. He, who had listened to the boy's acknowledgment of his fatal passion and so utterly condemned it, was winning away the love on which he had set his heart, under his very eyes. It would not do to think of it—it would drive him mad. Let Celia show Bertie, once for all, how little she cared for him; and then, if he were saved, what mattered the rest? He, Guy Lawrence, could bear to be misjudged as he had been all his life. What mattered a little more or a little less?

One by one—or rather two by two—the others had left the room, and Celia and Guy were alone together. He stood in the bright light, she lay in the shadow; he seemed to be looking at some photographs, and she seemed to be looking out into the twilight, across the quiet water.

Then she turned and looked at him, inviting him with her eyes to come and sit by her side. He came slowly and stood near her, but something of the anger that was in his heart showed itself in his face.

"Day-dreams, Celia?" he said at length. "What are you thinking of? Meditating fresh triumphs, or contemplating past conquests? How insatiable you are: a kind

of modern Juggernaut that men fall down and worship, only to be maimed and crushed and cast aside. I'm not sure the heathens didn't have the best of it, after all: they died for their idol and the gods were appeased; but your victims live and groan in agony, while you——"

"Guy——" She spoke in so sad a tone, her voice was so reproachful, that he instinctively stopped in the midst of his irony. "Am I so worthless? It is only just, perhaps, that you should despise me——"

"Despise you, Celia?" There was a tinge of contempt in his tone—he had not forgotten her manner to Bertie. "One doesn't despise now, it's too *prononcé*—that's the term, isn't it?—*anglicè*, honest—it's bad style, as Bertie says; and yet it's the wisest thing to do sometimes—I wish *he* thought so."

After a short pause. "How beautiful it is here," murmured Celia, not wishing to pursue the topic they had drifted into. "See the soft light the moon throws over those distant trees; see how the river flows beneath, like liquid silver."

"Almost as grand as the 'Haunt of the

Moonbeams' in a pantomime—isn't it? I can almost imagine 'La Belle Sorcière' rising from that island—where the public-house stands—to the accompaniment of mysterious music and the lime-light."

"Can you never think of me, never picture me to yourself except as an actress, with all the adjuncts of my profession? Is it so impossible for you to drop my trade for a minute?" she said, impatiently, taking offence at his tone more than his words.

"Wasn't it your sole aim, your sole ambition to make yourself one?"

There was a moment's silence. Celia sat gazing dreamily out into the twilight, with an unusual wistfulness in her eyes. "I wonder I cared so much about it," she said, in a very low voice, as if to herself; "it seems such a poor triumph since—since——"

Guy's face softened; he bent down to catch the last words.

"Since when, Celia?"

But she did not answer him. He sat down on the sofa and looked intently at her, but not so sternly as he had done a few minutes before.

"I wish you did think it a poor triumph, Celia; I wish you did think less of am-

bition, and more of the things which other women hold dear."

She questioned him with her eyes, and he went on.

"I am speaking of women who maybe are not so clever or so beautiful as you; but other hopes, other fears, fill up their lives—and I think it is right they should. I think it is better that in a woman's life ambition should be subordinate to love."

"Why do you wish that? what good would it do me if it were so—if—I were foolish enough to love any one?" she asked, after a moment's pause, with a tremor in her voice.

She listened so eagerly for his answer, as if she hungered for his words. It seemed to her as if she was so near to the attainment of her wildest desire, she scarcely dared breathe lest she should break the spell.

"It would teach you to feel more for those who love you; you'd know a little better what you are doing when you trifle with a thing so sadly, terribly real; the aching of your own heart might teach you to spare others."

Guy was looking out into the twilight at

two dark figures that passed by on the terrace, and he did not see the bitter disappointment that darkened her face. She did not speak for a moment, for she felt that she could not trust her voice; but she followed his glance, and knew that when he had spoken of love, he had not been thinking of himself, but of Bertie.

But she did not betray herself. She felt that the fact of Guy's speaking on this subject at all was one step in the right direction, and she was not a woman to be easily frustrated, or to let a small thing turn her from her purpose. She only set herself the more resolutely to overcome all difficulties by the sheer force of her will. Time and opportunity seemed in her favour, and she did not let slip any advantage.

"You preach mercy who never show it, and teach love who have never felt it," she said, looking straight up into his eyes. Then laying one white hand caressingly on his arm, "Why are you so hard on me, Guy?"

He took her hand and held it in his.

"Am I hard on you, Celia?" he said, sadly. "Perhaps I am; it is because I think too much—care too much——"

"Lawrence, are you ready to go? You said you wanted to be in town early, so I've ordered my brougham—it's just ten!"

Celia and Guy both turned round quickly.

It was Bentham who had spoken, but with such unusual abruptness that Guy scarcely recognised the voice, until he looked up and saw him standing there on the terrace, arm-in-arm with Bertie. He knew then how the bright light in the room had revealed their figures—his and hers — and shown them so clearly as they sat there, hand in hand, to the two friends who stood out in the twilight watching them. He could not see their faces, but he knew, if he could, what scorn and reproach he might have read there. For the first time in his life he felt what it was to be despised, and the humiliation was almost too great for him to bear.

He knew that he, Guy Lawrence, had been mentally tried by those two men, and found guilty of treachery—of dishonour. By Bentham, who, spite of his affectation, was a man whose opinion was not to be despised, because he himself was of spotless honour and integrity; and by Bertie. Oh,

was it not hard that he should seem to him this thing which he was not; that in Bertie's eyes he should appear treacherous and dishonourable?

Guy rose and turned to speak to Celia.

"Good-bye, Celia," he said, hurriedly, "I'm due in town at eleven, and Bentham has promised to drive me."

They could not see his face, but one of them fancied he could note a momentary hesitation in his voice.

"I must go, too," she said; and then, as they joined the others, she whispered, "Wait to see us off."

Celia was an autocrat whose command Bertie, incensed though he was, had not the courage to disobey; so he went to order the drag while the other stray members of the party were collected and disinterred from the various retreats whither they had betaken themselves.

"You'll come on the drag, as we all start together, wont you, Bentham?" said Bertie, as they stood on the steps. "You haven't ridden behind my team yet. Guy can have the brougham to himself, and go straight to his destination, wherever that may be. You'll be in town quite as soon."

Bentham, to whom Guy's conduct was quite inexplicable, was glad enough to escape a tête-à-tête drive with him; so he closed with Bertie's offer, and turning to Guy explained that the brougham in which he had come down, being too late for the drag, was at his disposal. But Guy lingered. He was anxious to get away, but he would not go at any man's bidding, and so he waited till the drag was brought to the door. A difficult matter to accomplish, for the horses, which did not at any time merit Bertie's description of "good, quiet sort of cattle," coming fresh from the stable and unlimited feeds of corn, were very restive; and the near-side leader reared and plunged in a way that made some of the more nervous among the women cry out and turn pale with alarm.

Bertie, taking the reins in one hand, settled himself on the box.

"Who will venture first?" he said, with a smile, holding out the other.

There was a moment's silence, and then Adèle Trébillon sprang forward with a light laugh.

"*Mon Dieu*, but you are all cowards," she said, as she jumped up the steps as

airily as if she were ascending a mountain pass in a *ballet d'action.*

One by one they followed, till Bentham and Celia were the only ones who remained below; Bentham held out his hand to assist her up the steps, and Bertie turned and looked at her as he arranged the cushions on the seat by his side. His anger was almost obliterated in the pleasurable anticipation of the drive, and he smiled as he waited for her.

But Celia drew back.

"No, I cannot go, I am afraid," she said resolutely; but her eyes dropped and even she quailed before the sudden fury her words caused. For a moment Bertie could not speak: this was the last drop in the cup of bitterness which she had given him to drink throughout the evening, the last straw which broke down all his patience and made self-restraint no longer possible.

"Wouldn't be better to say you *wont* come—better to tell the truth for once?" he gasped out.

Celia looked up into the white face, quivering with rage, and laughed.

"*Eh bien!* put it so, if you like; say I will not come. Life has not quite lost

[illegible]

Perhaps it was as well they did not. There is no greater leveller than unrestrained passion, no greater refutation of the maxim, "Noblesse oblige." Dukes and dustmen, duchesses and fish-women, sink to a common level under the influence of unrestrained anger; and then rank,

nobility, and even manhood, are apt to be forgotten. Bertie Deverell, who had never practised the smallest self-control, would at that moment have said anything and everything that came to his mind.

"You are welcome to the use of my brougham," said Bentham, turning in the midst of the confusion to Celia, who stood calmly watching her own work. "Lawrence will escort you to town," and then without waiting for a reply, he sprang up on to the box-seat by Bertie's side.

In obedience to a sign from him, the grooms left the horses' heads, and Bertie tried to start them; but, fretted and chafed by the delay, they required more cool and skilful management than he could at that moment bestow upon them. The leaders jibbed, and he raised the whip and lashed them. The near-side one, a young horse, reared in mid-air, and threatened to break over the traces. There was a shriek of terror, a fearful plunging and kicking, and Guy sprang forward, and clinging on with all his power to the horses' head, dragged him down.

"Let go!" shouted Bertie, white with fury.

"Not till you give the reins to Bentham; you're not in a state to drive."

"Then by G—, I'll make you!" and raising his whip, he brought it down with all his force on Guy's arm.

With a stifled cry, Guy let go his hold, and turned on his brother, with his arm upraised, as if he would have dragged him from his seat—then he let it fall, and turned away without a word.

Another lash of the whip, a few more plunges, and they were away—away at a mad pace—and not one backward look from Bertie at the man, who, for the first time in his life, had been insulted—and by his own brother.

"Are you hurt?" murmured Celia, looking into his face with great pitiful eyes. "Was it an accident?"

"Yes," answered Guy—"God forgive me the lie," he thought—"It wasn't the whip that hurt me; I broke this arm once, and I've strained it a little, but it's nothing really. Will you get into the brougham and wait for me? I'll come to you presently."

For a moment Celia hesitated. She thought that he wanted to leave her be-

cause he was suffering so much that he could not conceal his agony, and she longed most intensely to stay with him. But she loved him, and feared him, and did what not what one woman in a hundred would have done—overcame the natural impulse which prompted her to remain by his side, and obeying him without a word, went and waited patiently until he came to her.

And Guy turned back into the hotel. He wanted to be alone, not so much on account of the physical pain he was enduring—though it was true that in hanging on to the horse's head he had severely strained the arm which had never quite recovered the accident at Aylesbury—but because he felt that he must be a few minutes by himself before he could seem the same as usual. He went into the room where they had dined—now deserted—and, throwing himself on a couch, turned his face away from the light, to catch the cool evening breeze. He remained there motionless for some little while, and then he rose slowly, and, going to the light, gazed long and steadfastly at the livid blue line which lay all across his hand and wrist. Once he would have looked at the mark of such

a blow in a terrible tumult of anger and shame, that any man—even though he was his brother—should have dared to lift his hand against him, with a fierce desire for any vengeance which should wipe out the stigma of such an insult. But slowly, yet surely, Guy Lawrence was learning the great lesson of his life—to endure; and his face, though it looked very white under the glare of the lamps, bore no traces of anger; only of a sorrow too great, a trouble too deep, for any words.

Rolling along through the quiet night, these two, whose lives and destinies were so inextricably and strangely interwoven, sat for a while, side by side, almost in silence.

The one was thinking—thinking deeply and bitterly of all that had passed between himself and his brother; the other was feeling—feeling that she was alone with the man she loved, and that perhaps on this hour depended all the happiness of her future life.

The silence was becoming almost oppressive. Celia, sitting by Guy's side, seeing him so absorbed in thought, so unconscious of her presence, began to feel as if she

would suffocate if it continued much longer: but her heart was so full of one thing, she could not bring her lips to utter any vague commonplaces. At last she touched his arm lightly with her hand, as if she were arousing him from sleep.

"Guy, I would give a good deal to know your thoughts—wont you trust me with them?"

"You wouldn't care to have them," he answered sadly.

"They seem very interesting—more interesting than I. You haven't spoken to me for a quarter of an hour."

"They couldn't be more interesting than you—and they were of you, partly."

"Of me?"—with a bright flush, and a pretty pretence of surprise, that made Guy smile for a moment—only for a moment—and then his face grew very grave again.

"Celia," he said, after a short silence, "I wonder if I could trust you with my thoughts? I wonder if it would be better if I were to tell you all—and leave it in your hands. Will you listen to me?"

She did not speak, but her eyes answered him with an intensity of expression he had not expected. He was too much absorbed

in his own train of thought to guess that she had given another meaning to his words than that which he had intended them to convey.

"Among other things," he continued, "my thoughts have been wandering back to a time long past—perhaps forgotten by you—when you, because you fancied I had some small claim on your gratitude, on your remembrance, said you would do anything you could to please me—for my sake. Forgive me for reminding you of it—I feel it is wrong, ungenerous—but I want to establish a claim on your mercy, your forbearance; and I have no other."

"You need none. Ask me only to do anything for your sake, and I will do it; there is not anything I will not do—for you."

"And the favour I would ask you seems such an easy one for you to grant; and yet, I fear—— Celia," he went on very earnestly, "you have a hundred lovers, and I only ask you to give up one, and one that you do not care for. You know how much Bertie loves you, you know better than I can tell you. If I were speaking to another woman it might be unwise of me

to teach her the extent of her power, but you are perfectly well aware how madly he loves you, how absolutely and entirely he is your slave. You say you will do anything to please me, and this is all I ask you: to spare him, to save him from the misery that is in store for him; as far as you can."

"Is it so terrible a thing to love me?" she interrupted in a harsh voice. Her face had changed suddenly; a grey shadow seemed to have fallen over it, and her eyes blazed as she turned upon him. "Am I a pariah, an outcast, a thing to be hated and dreaded, that you ask me to save your brother from myself as I would from the pestilence?"

"Celia, hear me one moment. I only ask you to tell him the truth—you don't love him. You know you don't: I have read in your face, I have seen in your manner, that you scorn and despise him; and yet somehow—Heaven knows how—you have managed to delude him into the belief that you return his love. I only beg you, implore you, to open his eyes yourself; for you, only you, can do it."

"Judge for yourself; you have seen us

together. Is it my fault or his if he thinks that I love him?"

"You must have encouraged him. Bertie's not a fool; he wouldn't hang on to a vain hope. Celia, you may not have promised anything—I don't suppose you have; you are not a woman to bind yourself down to any vows; but you've led him to believe that in the end you will reward him by marrying him; he endures your caprices, he tries to overcome his jealousy at your attentions to others, because he believes — you have led him to believe—that your real love is for him, For pity's sake don't quibble over a thing that is life or death to him, though it may be sport to you. I ask you to tell him that you don't love him; to set him free once for all. Have some pity, some womanly pity, on him. He is only a mere boy; he loves you to his ruin, his misery. What will his life be worth when you cast him off—as I suppose you will, sooner or later?"

"You are very wise. How do you know that I do not intend to marry him?"

Guy thought to himself that that was

what he dreaded more than anything else, but he could not tell her so.

"Give me the assurance that you love him, and I will try to be content—try to believe that he will be happy, if you do; but," he added with sudden passion, fixing his eyes on her face, "you do not—I know you do not. You cannot deceive me, and you have no right to deceive him; I will not let you."

She did not answer him. She turned away her head, and gazed out into the darkness.

Guy caught her hand.

"Celia, forgive me if I have spoken too strongly, and seemed harsh. You can't know all I feel on this subject. He is my charge, and he has no one else to care for him but me. Dear Celia, wont you keep your promise, and do this thing for my sake? I saved your life once. I ask you now to give me his."

She tore away her hand and burst into a sudden passion of tears.

"You have no right to ask me—I wont do it: he at least loves me, and I wont cast away his love or do anything at your bidding. Why should I care to please you

—you, who——" She broke off, and burying her face in her hands, as if to smother the words that came to her lips, rocked herself to and fro.

"What have I done, Celia—what have I done?" said Guy, trying to draw away her hands.

"You are cruel—cruel—more cruel than I." The words were half stifled, scarcely articulate, but Guy heard them and was silent.

For he knew then what she meant; knew that she, half consciously half unconsciously, accused him of having gained her love. He dared not speak; the remembrance of Kitty Lorton, the possibility that she might still love him, sealed his lips. He could not a second time endanger her happiness and his own.

And so they drove in silence to the house in Curzon Street.

"Celia, good-bye: don't be angry with me. I had no right to ask you to do anything. Will you forgive me?"

She only pressed his hand, she did not speak, and he watched her until the door closed upon her, and then turned away with a heavy heart.

In vain he asked himself, when he found himself alone, whether he had done wisely in speaking to her on this subject or not. It had been impossible for him to say all that was in his mind; he could not insult her by asking her to save Bertie from a marriage with herself—he could only use the other plea, that she did not love him, and it was therefore wrong and cruel to delude him with the idea that she did. He had been able to say so little, that he really felt, after all, perhaps it would have been better to have held his peace and trusted to time and the change in Celia's manner towards Bertie to effect his cure. But would he ever be cured? Would not the slightest encouragement, the least return of Celia's warmth, rekindle the flame of his love and make it blaze anew? And yet, again, wilful, imperious, fickle as this woman was, who could tell but that the toy once cast aside would be abandoned, uncared for, and forgotten?

And so, bewildered by conflicting thoughts, oppressed by a sadness he could not overcome, Guy gave up his intention of going elsewhere, and wandered wearily homewards.

## CHAPTER IX.

ESTELLE, the famous actress, was undoubtedly a very beautiful woman.

*En grande tenue*, rustling in silks and satins, shrouded in laces, and gleaming with jewels, she was magnificent; she took the world by storm and compelled admiration; but she should have been seen *en déshabille* to be seen to perfection. Then her beauty lost something of its hardness, its self-assertive grandeur, and was softer and more womanly. See her in her dressing-room the night after the Richmond dinner, her costly attire flung aside, a soft white wrapper half-shrouding, half-revealing, her perfect form; her hair unbound, hanging like a dusky cloud over her shoulders, and falling in heavy waving masses down to her waist, touched here and there with strange glints of light where it caught the reflection of the candles; two

gleaming white arms resting on the dressing-table and supporting a pale face, with bright, ever-restless eyes, full of a troubled, passion-stirred eagerness.

Some one said once that Estelle had a face that could express all the emotions which she did not feel, and could hide all those that she did feel: but Estelle in public and Estelle in private, were two different beings. For a while, she could drop her assumed character and be herself; for a while, she could forget the ambitious rôle she had taken upon herself in the great drama that is for ever being played on the world's stage; for a while, she could give over the ceaseless struggle to be great, and be only a woman, with an aching heart.

She loved Guy Lawrence; and in her wounded pride and love, suffered more than many a better woman. There was nothing mean or small about her nature, though it may have been a bad one. She had immense powers of endurance, of concentrating all her thoughts, all her will, upon one object until she attained it; and she had equal powers of loving and hating.

She loved Guy Lawrence with an inten-

sity that was part of her character, and she suffered accordingly.

Long ago she had, in the consciousness of her own strength of will, set herself above the weaknesses of other women. She had said that because no one loved her or cared what became of her, she would make her life for herself, she would live for her ambition. She had told Guy Lawrence so that summer day which seemed so long ago, and there had come to her no prevision of a time when ambition, desire for admiration, for wealth and fame, all would be merged in one absorbing feeling; of a time when even her triumph would have lost its sweetness in the never-ceasing longing for the one thing she could not gain—his love.

This love had come upon her against her will. Slowly, reluctantly, she yielded herself to it. Her nature, strong and hard and self-reliant, unconsciously acknowledged the superiority of his—"*elle avait trouvée son maître.*" His very sternness and harshness to her compelled her homage. She was not capable of loving a man for whom she had no fear and for whom she felt a spark of pity. The tenderness and

compassion which is the very germ of love in some womanly hearts, had no place in hers. Her love was like herself—violent and stormy and passionate. Even his indifference added flame to it, for opposition only galled her into the more intense striving after the thing which she desired. Her creed was, that a woman with a strong will could do anything; and yet even with such beauty as hers she had not been able to win his love.

Baffled and thwarted she acknowledged herself to be that night, as she leaned her face on her hands and thought over all that had passed. She set her teeth and clenched her fingers in her hair as she thought how she had deluded herself with hope, how she had believed that she was so near to the attainment of her desire when in reality she had been so far from it. Yet she was not daunted. Unscrupulous, unfettered by the reticence and modesty which deter most women from striving to gain a man's love—from the fear that such striving may become apparent—with a cool brain, a steady judgment, and the power of seeming that which she was not, there were still many moves she could make in

this dangerous game which she had set herself to play, and with such a combination of forces it would be strange if she did not win.

She might not be able to gain his love at first, for love is a thing that cannot be forced, but she vowed that she would use every means in her power, fair or foul, to bind him to her so firmly that he would not be able to leave her; and then, surely, love would follow. She raised her head and looked at the reflection of her own beautiful face in the mirror. She knew full well the power of its seductive, sensuous loveliness; she could count out the value of each separate charm, each separate beauty, as a dealer counts out the gold with which he means to bid for the treasure on which he has set his heart; but the look changed to a fierce, vengeful stare, as if she almost hated the beauty which had failed to win the love she most desired, and her head dropped again upon her hands. "It's all no good, all no good," she sighed, "if he despises me."

And then again she sank into thought so engrossing, so deep, that the minutes flew by till they lengthened into hours, and

still she sat there motionless. Her mind was wandering back to the time when she first became acquainted with Bertie Deverell. She was remembering how, knowing that he was Guy's brother, she had accorded him more freedom in seeing her than to any of the other men who sought her; how her manner to him had always been dangerously kind; how from admiring her he had come to love her passionately, devotedly, and she had drawn him on and encouraged his love, not because she had even a passing tendresse for Bertie himself, but because he was Guy's brother.

Guy had been her hero since the days of her childhood. He had been very great in her eyes, and he had not accorded her in her womanhood the admiration she had expected from him, he had angered her and opposed her wishes. The greatest glory of her success, the greatest sweetness of her triumph, had been that some day he would see it and be forced to acknowledge it. Through all the striving after it, through all the gaining of it, her one thought had been of him, and what he would think of it. And Bertie's love and homage had seemed an additional triumph

to her, because she knew that Guy cared for him and thought much of him, and it was sweet to her to think that she held him so firmly in her chains.

Then her thoughts came to the time when Guy had returned from abroad, and she, seeing him, had learnt to love him in her passionate, headstrong way. She thought how he had angered her from the first, by letting her see how much he dreaded her power over Bertie, how he had goaded her into a determination not to do as he wished, not to set Bertie free from her slavery; and then again her mouth relaxed from its hard lines, her face softened as she dwelt on the remembrance of the few times when Guy had been kind to her, seemed almost to love her, till she had cared no more about Bertie's allegiance and had been rude to him and almost given him his *congé*. But this evening she had discovered the vanity of her hopes, had learnt that even when Guy had been most tender to her, his thoughts had been of Bertie—only of Bertie. She told herself bitterly that through him, the foolish boy whom she in her careless cruelty was leading on to ruin, lay her only attraction

for, her only power over, the man she loved. Was it likely then that she would set him free from the spell she had thrown upon him, till she had gained her end and he was of no more use to her?

At present he was of use to her, for Guy could not be indifferent to her as long as he knew her power over his brother and feared it.

Then all at once the tension of her thoughts gave way: her fingers that were clenched in her hair relaxed their hold; her head drooped lower and lower, until her cold white face rested itself on the table, one great gasping sob came from her heaving bosom, and she clasped her hands as if in an agony of supplication to some unseen being.

"Give me his love—only his love. Take away all else, but give me only that. I will give my soul for that, if I have a soul; I would give my life, only I cannot die without him. Take everything, take everything — only give me his love."

She, destitute of religion or principle, blind to any knowledge of good or evil, appealed in her passion to some unknown

Power, whose omnipotence she had never before acknowledged.

Had she, Undine-like, found her soul through her love?

* * * * *

The next morning found Guy Lawrence on his way to Jermyn Street.

He could scarcely have told what led him there, or what he meant to say to Bertie when he found himself in his presence. All he knew was that he could no longer bear the estrangement that was growing up between himself and his brother, and that he must end it in some way. He knew after the insult he had received, it was for Bertie to make the *amende*, and for him to forgive; and for awhile he had a struggle with the pride which bade him stop away and shun the presence of one who had so grievously wounded him; but then again his generosity, his love for his brother, got the better of him; he reminded himself how great the provocation must have seemed in Bertie's eyes, how passionate he had always been, but then how ready to forgive and to forget all wrongs. And he resolved that he would go to him, and let him see

that he bore him no malice for that which had passed between them, and try to win his confidence, and bring things to a better state than they were in now.

Surely, after the experience of the previous evening, it would not be so hard to convince him of the small amount of affection that Celia bore him, to induce him to give up this misplaced love, and turn his thoughts to some worthier ambition than the winning of an actress's false smiles.

Pondering thus, Guy found himself at his destination. The door was opened by Saunders, Bertie's groom, who was waiting for orders.

"Ah, Saunders," said Guy, in recognition of the man's salute; "Mr. Bertie at home?"

"Yes, sir, but he's engaged with a gentleman, and said as he wasn't to be disturbed."

"Oh, very well. I'll wait till the gentleman has gone then. Are you all right?"

"Pretty middling, sir, thank ye, sir; a bruise or two, you know, sir, but nothing to speak about."

"Bruises! How did you get them?"

asked Guy, anxiously, as if a sudden fear had occurred to him.

"Last night, sir; maybe you haven't heard, sir, as we come to grief at Richmond?"

"Good heavens, no! What happened? —tell me!"

"Why you see, sir, when we had left the Star and Garter we came down the hill at such a pace that the ladies got frightened, and one of 'em was a goin' into 'isterics; upon which Mr. Bertie, who was a bit angry about something, I think, sir, without a word, drove straight into the station, and told 'em if they was a goin' to be foolish they'd better go home by rail. So down they all gets, except Mr. Bentham. Mr. Bertie was werry angry——"

"Never mind all that; tell me about the accident."

"I'm a coming to that now, sir. Mr. Bertie was just a turning round to come out of the station, when the near leader got frightened at a van of excursion people as was a passing and hoorrayin', and Mr. Bertie, instead of soothing him like, sir, set to and lashed at him as 'ard as he could. Well, sir, up he goes a pawing in the air,

then out went his 'eels, and afore you could say Jack Robinson, swerved round, and took us agin a lamp-post; the near fore-wheel caught it, and over we all went."

"But Mr. Bertie—was he hurt much?" asked Guy, impatiently, and his face had grown very pale.

"No, sir, nothing very serious. You see, sir, we wasn't going at no pace. Hurt his arm, I think, sir. Mr. Bentham twisted his ankle a bit and cut his hand, that's all. Me and Jarvis was a gettin' down when the smash came—so you see, sir, we hadn't got werry far to fall. The wust happened to the near wheeler. A werry bad kick he got, as the young 'un was a lashing out."

Guy turned away without waiting to hear more. Ascending the stairs he encountered a man who was descending. An over-dressed, yellow-faced, black-bearded man, with leering eyes peering out under bushy eyebrows, curly hair, a long drawn mouth, and a nose that proclaimed him a descendant of the house of Abraham. As Guy passed him, he stood aside with a profound obeisance, and a swift glance of scrutiny.

"So it has come to this, then?" Guy

thought. "Bertie has fallen among thieves indeed. He is particularly engaged, and his friend is—Mr. Leoni. Daresay that man knows more about me, and what I'm worth, and what I'm likely to be worth at the end of a few years if I go on paying Bertie's debts, than I do myself. I shouldn't wonder if he counted all my grey hairs, my wrinkles and furrows, and made an exact mental calculation of the chances of my marrying as he passed me on the stairs."

"How are you, Bertie?" he said, entering the room, and going straight up to his brother.

Bertie, newspaper in hand, dressed in his old morning costume of black velvet, was lying back in an arm-chair, with an air of lassitude and weariness; but he started as Guy entered, and flushed crimson as he nervously took and then dropped his brother's outstretched hand.

"All right, thanks; that is, a little tired. Went into Leath's last night—didn't get home till four."

"Went into Leath's? I wonder you were fit. I heard you came to grief and hurt your arm. You shouldn't play tricks

with yourself. You don't look over strong, Bertie," said Guy, regarding him with anxious eyes.

Bertie laughed—a constrained, nervous laugh, that he meant to be careless.

"My arm's all right—only a scratch or two, or a sprain or something. Can't think what the deuce they tied it up in this thing for; I suppose they thought it looked interesting," he said, as he saw Guy's glance fall on the violet scarf that was doing duty as a sling.

There was a moment's silence, a very awkward one, which neither of them knew how to break. Guy was thinking how strange this meeting was, after the manner in which they had parted on the previous evening; and yet how impossible it was for him to do or say anything else. He could not fall into his brother's arms and make a grand scene of forgiveness and reconciliation, French fashion. He could only hold out his hand to him, and show by his manner that he bore no malice. And then he could tell by Bertie's looks, by his hurried nervous manner, that he neither desired to forgive, or to be forgiven; that he was still full of wrath and jealousy—they were only

smouldering, and would, at the smallest provocation, burst out afresh—and Bertie was wondering which of his two morning visitors he would sooner have avoided.

"Saunders was waiting to see you when I came up; he seems a little knocked about."

"Why in the name of goodness hasn't he come up? I've been wanting to see him," said Bertie, ringing the bell with an impatient jerk.

"He said you were engaged with—a gentleman."

"He's a fool—doesn't half know his business," muttered Bertie; then turning to the man who answered the door, "Send Saunders up."

"He's a good servant, and a faithful one," said Guy, as the door closed.

And then when the groom came up he turned away and took up a paper, while Bertie began questioning the man in an angry, authoritative tone.

"How are the bays?"

"All right, sir, barring Beauty, and she's got a werry ugly kick that the young 'un give her when he was a lashing out; don't know what to make of her quite, sir."

"Don't know what to make of her?" cried Bertie, petulantly, "then why the deuce don't you send for some one who does? I'm to lose a hundred-guinea horse because I've got an infernal fool for a groom. Send for Mr. Ivan, the vet., at once. Is the drag injured?"

"Yes, sir; knocked about a good deal," replied Saunders, in a humble tone.

"Get that looked to as well then," replied Bertie, biting his lips with anger. "And now, get out—but stop, bring the brougham round in half an hour."

Guy, hearing Bertie talk of drags and broughams and hundred-guinea horses, thought to himself that he should wonder how it was possible to do all this on little more than a thousand a year—for that was the sum he had allowed his brother since he had left college, in addition to the small legacy left to him by his mother—if he had not encountered that Jew money-lender on the stairs. He began to think that perhaps he ought to speak to Bertie about it, only he could not bear to mention the subject, knowing that his brother was dependent on his generosity. He was painfully conscious all the while of the way in which Bertie

was speaking to Saunders, and it was a great relief to him when the man was allowed to depart.

"I'm sorry the horse is injured," he said, as the door closed, and Bertie threw himself back in his chair with a sullen frown.

"Sorry, are you? It's a pity your repentance didn't come a little sooner. I have to thank you for this and for a good deal more besides."

"I don't quite understand you."

"Don't you?" retorted Bertie, his face blazing with passion; "it's easy to understand my meaning. Do you think any horse would stand having his head pulled and dragged at as you dragged at his: do you think any other man would stand such treatment as you bestowed on me last night? I take my oath, if it had been any one else I'd have horsewhipped him for it. As it is——"

Bertie faltered, and the words died on his lips. His eyes had fallen on Guy's hand—on the deep blue wale that lay across it.

"As it is," said Guy, quietly, "I think it is *I* who have to forgive—not *you*.

That"—with a glance at his hand—"was the first blow I have ever received and not resented—and it shall be the last. You presumed too much on the fact that I once told you I would bear anything from you; but I came here to-day determined to forget all that, not to reproach you for it. As for your accusations, I pass over the first and the absurdity of it; the second——"

"The second! Can you speak to me of insult, can you look me in the face, after your cowardly treachery? You, who came at my invitation, to try and rob me of the affections of the woman whom you know I care for, and whom you sneer at and revile behind her back? When I think how you came to me with your hypocritical cant and pretended to warn me against her, I feel as if no words were strong enough to express my abhorrence of your conduct."

Guy paled visibly, but still he answered very quietly—

"You condemn me because you do not, cannot understand that it was for you, to show you what she is, how undeserving of your love, I did this. Bertie, you have a right to demand an explanation of me, though not in the words or the tone you

have used, and I will give it you. Seeing what she was—this woman whom you love, and whom I hate, because she is trying to ruin your life—seeing how willing she was to pay attention to me for some mercenary motive of her own, I led her on, and my sole and simple reason was to show her to you in her true light as a vain, unscrupulous woman, who was willing to throw you over at a moment's notice. If I have succeeded in this, if I have opened your eyes to the truth, I am content; even though I have forfeited all the regard I once hoped you would have for me, even though you think me dishonourable and treacherous."

Guy sank back in his chair and shaded his face with one hand.

"Conduct worthy of a gentleman, certainly! Supposing I believed this farrago of nonsense, perhaps you'll explain to me how you excuse yourself from the very crime of which you accuse me. If she has led *me* on to throw me over, haven't you led *her* on, according to your own account, with the same intention?"

"She is out of the pale of my consideration when your happiness is at stake. Her heart isn't likely to be broken; she deserves

some punishment for the way she has treated you. She may go to the devil if you are saved."

"Nice words to use about the lady whom you honoured with your attentions a few hours ago. Shall I repeat to her the elegant compliments you have paid her?" answered Bertie, in his passion.

"You can do as you like about that—it's a matter of indifference to me. But this is childish, Bertie. I came not to reproach you, or to listen to your reproaches. If you will still believe that I have wronged you, I must try and bear your injustice; though Heaven knows I haven't deserved it."

"Why the deuce need you interfere with me at all? Why can't you leave me alone."

"You know why I can't, Bertie. You know why it is impossible for me to stand by and see you go to ruin your own way without trying my best to save you. Do you think anything but the remembrance of the strong tie you have upon me would have induced me to do as I have done? Do you think any other living being, after having received such an insult as I last

night received from you, would come the following morning to greet the man who inflicted it, as if nothing had happened; ignoring his own humiliation, conquering his own pride? *I* never would have, I never could have, but for the remembrance of the promise I made to her——"

"And it is for her sake, I suppose, that you have opposed me in every way—that you have constantly thrust yourself between me and my wishes. I'm glad at least you've dropped the confounded twaddle you used to talk about your affection for me."

Bertie threw himself back with the petulance of a spoilt child, and Guy was silent for a moment, thinking how difficult it was to speak to him rationally in his present mood.

"Men don't talk much about their affection for each other, as a rule," he said presently. "If I ever spoke of mine to you it was because, at the time of my mother's death, I felt as if I ought to be to you more like a father than a brother. I am so much older than you, and the difference in our ages was still more apparent then, when

you were a mere boy, and I a man who looked nearly twenty years your senior. Latterly I have only tried to show you that I would do all I could for you."

"I felicitate you on what you have done," sneered Bertie.

Stung by his ingratitude, Guy answered with warmth, "I have done all I can—given you as large an allowance as, taking everything into consideration, the keeping up of the estate and that sort of thing, it seems to me I can afford; paid your debts and never said a word, as perhaps I ought to have done, when I have seen you living far beyond your income; though of course I know that all debts and liabilities you incur will sooner or later come upon me."

"By heaven, I can't stand this!" cried Bertie. "Have you come here to taunt me with my dependence? You need scarcely trouble yourself about my debts. I can very well bear my own burdens."

"Do you think that as long as I have a penny in the world I will refuse to help you out of your difficulties? It was you who drove me, by your accusations, to speak of these things, which I would never otherwise have mentioned."

There was a silence. Then Bertie rose. "I must go," he said, moodily; "I have an engagement."

Guy rose also, and looked hard at him for a moment. Then, as he turned away without even shaking hands, he said—

"Bertie, are we to part like this? I came, hoping to end the estrangement which seems to be growing up between us. Are we to go on like this for ever, seeming more like enemies than friends?"

"As long as you set yourself in antagonism to me, as long as you persist in your present line of conduct with regard to this matter, we shall be enemies."

"Do you refer to——"

"To Mademoiselle Ragoni? Certainly I do." He turned and faced Guy, and spoke with more firmness and decision than he usually showed

"Is it possible that you can still believe in a woman who has treated you as she has done?"

"I never blamed her, only you; it was not her fault, only yours. I was angry with her for a moment, but I have forgiven her long ago. Did you think my love for her could be so easily turned aside? Did

you think you could come between us and separate us? Ah, no." With a look that had in it something more than defiance of his brother's power; that had love, and trust, and faith in the woman who was so ready to betray him, "By and bye we shall forget all this that has passed, and laugh at your futile efforts."

Guy could scarcely suppress a groan. It seemed to him there was something almost grand in this absolute trust and faith, this blind love; and when he thought how little worthy this woman was of such true devotion, how she scorned, and despised, and betrayed it, he felt a bitter detestation for her; and a strange, unnatural craving to be revenged upon her took possession of him.

"You mean——"

"That I will marry her yet, in spite of you."

"And I will save you yet, in spite of yourself, if I can; and if I can't, Heaven help you." And so saying, Guy took up his hat and left the room, as Bertie disappeared through the door which led into the adjoining one.

He walked along mechanically, so ab-

sorbed in painful thought that he neither knew or cared where he went, until, suddenly waking up to consciousness, he found himself on the other side of the Park; and, forming a sudden resolve, he turned his steps Grosvenor Square-wards.

## CHAPTER X.

YES, Mrs. Hoare was at home," and Guy ascended the stairs, and unannounced opened the drawing-room door.

The scene that met his eyes presented a strange, almost painful contrast to his own sombre thoughts. A white cloth, thrown down to protect the carpet, strewn with heaps of brilliant hothouse flowers; two girls and a child seated on the floor in carelessly artistic attitudes, arranging them in delicate vases and great Indian-china bowls.

Kitty, with her black frock, her simply-bound chestnut hair, and her pale, tender face bent low over a bunch of crimson roses; Lily Ransford, with her brilliant colouring, her gleaming golden locks, her pink-and-white cheeks, her red lips, and her gay costume of white muslin and blue bows, dipping her dimpled rosy fingers into the flower mass; and the child, holding up a

gorgeous Passion-flower against her own fair baby face; a little farther off another child buried among the cushions of a sofa, intent on a book; and seated at a little table drawn near the window, Mrs. Hoare, in a simple morning dress, with a charming assumption of dignity and matronhood in the little lace cap that adorned her pretty head, writing letters.

These were the salient points of the picture, which Guy stood for a moment to observe; but his entrance was greeted by a shout of welcome from Lily Ransford and the children.

"Come in, Cousin Guy," cried Lily. "Why are you standing there, like——"

"Like the Peri at the gate of Paradise; but since the angels bid me enter, I suppose I may?" and he came forward with a smile. "You look so delightfully cool and beautiful."

"Does the 'beautiful' apply to us or the temperature? You always talk like the Sphinx, Cousin Guy."

"If I could paint a picture of you all just as you are, you wouldn't ask, Lily; shall I try a new and improved edition of Millais' 'Apple Blossoms?'"

"I don't feel flattered by the suggestion; it's rank heresy, I know, but the carrots predominate so strongly over the flowers, that I never could admire that picture," answered Lily, with a little *moue* of disdain.

"Oh, sweet girl-critic 'with the golden hair,' don't be so severe."

"Shade of Tennyson! what right have you to misquote my favourite poet, sir?"

But Guy did not hear her. He had shaken hands with Kitty last of all, and he was instantly struck by the coldness of her manner. It chilled him suddenly, set him wondering what he could have done to offend her; but there was no sense of offence, no sign of feeling of any sort shown in her manner. She only just touched his hand, and looked up into his face with the most polite indifference. The blushing hesitation, the half repressed tenderness of yesterday, which had seemed as if she longed yet feared to give him hope, were gone.

Was it only her coyness, or only his fancy?

He tried to think so, and set himself to please her.

"Can I offer my assistance, Lily? You are only playing; Miss Lorton is doing all

the work. What is the aim and object of all this decorative art?"

"Don't you know Clara is going to have one of her stupid kettledrums—idiotic affairs. Are you going to be one of the victims? We sent you a card."

"What are kettledrums? They've come into fashion since my time."

"What are they? Festive occasions when we young people immolate ourselves on the altar of society; and to propitiate the gods—I mean the old ladies—consume a little bad tea and a great deal of gossip."

"It isn't necessary that the tea should be bad, Lily," put in Mrs. Hoare.

"No, but the gossip must be. It wouldn't have any flavour if it wasn't—well—*tant soit peu méchante.*"

"Lily, Lily, what will people think of you, if you run on like that?"

"Who are 'people?' My present audience consists of Guy and Kitty. As for Guy, I've existed so long without his good opinion, *sans doute* I can do it in the future. And Kitty, she knows me better than to think badly of me—don't you, little mouse?"

Lily bent her pretty head and touched Kitty's pale cheek with the flowers she

held in her hand, with a sort of coaxing tenderness; and Kitty looked back at her and smiled.

There had grown up a sudden liking between these two. Lily Ransford was staying in Grosvenor Square on a visit, and she, in her impetuous, school-girlish way, had grown quite fond of the little governess. She was so genuinely good-natured, so merry, so loveable—though people did call her "slangy" and "fast"—that Kitty could not choose but like her; and felt terribly ashamed of her own jealousy of her on the day of the picnic; all the more so since she had discovered that the intimacy between Lily and Guy Lawrence was so purely a cousinly one, and that it was that other beautiful, resplendent woman, whom she had seen with him on the drag, who probably held him captive *pour le moment.*

She sat very silent, arranging her flowers, answering the questions Guy addressed to her as briefly as possible; speaking now and then to Lily or the children, but appearing to take no interest in anything that was going on around; and Guy was growing more and

more puzzled and tormented by her manner.

"There, put that pale rose next to the deep crimson one — contrasts are *chic*. Those two go very well together, and yet they are as much unlike each other as —as—" with a sudden brilliant idea, "you and Cousin Guy. The little white rose is most like you, Kitty, and the crimson——"

"Thank you, Lily," interrupted Guy, ruefully, "for the comparison. I know I'm very unpresentable, but has my complexion *quite* attained to that hue?"

There was a laugh—then continued the ceaseless chatter.

"Don't you wish there was a stream in the middle of Clara's drawing-room, that we might play at fortune-telling, like we used to do at school?—send the roses floating down side by side, and see how long they would keep together. For instance, you and——"

"Lily, give me that heliotrope, and now a piece of maidenhair—we shall never have done if you talk so."

"Oh you wise, industrious little creature! I never could continue long at one

thing. Guy, why weren't you at Lady Dancy's last night?"

"Don't know—forgot all about it."

"Where were you?"

"At —— in the country."

"What were you doing 'at ——— in the country?' You couldn't have gone far, for you were here yesterday morning, and here you are again."

"I dined at Richmond with some friends."

"Those men's dinners," pouted Lily; "unsociable, horrid affairs! Why don't they ask *us* to go with them?"

"Perhaps we should be *de trop*," said Kitty, speaking with strange emphasis.

Guy looked at her in surprise. It seemed to him that she meant more than she said; that she, having more knowledge perhaps of the bad side of life than Lily, who was fresh from school, knew that women of a certain class generally formed part of these Richmond dinners. If she had meant that, then her speech was out of taste, misplaced, and almost unladylike. Guy felt quite angry with her for a moment—he did not know all she had seen and heard, and that it was only pique and jealousy that

led her to make that little bitter speech about being *de trop*.

He did not know that she was accusing him in her heart of duplicity and falsehood; of leading them to believe it was "one of those men's dinners," when she, with her own eyes, had seen him sitting side by side with that beautiful woman, and heard that he was "always with her and going to marry her."

Guy rose from his lowly seat; he was vexed with her, and went to console himself with the little girl who lay curled up on the sofa.

"What are you studying so attentively, little one?" he said, caressing the child's fair locks.

"Miss Lorton's confessions."

There was a laugh, and Kitty blushed crimson.

"You *are* behind the age, Guy," explained Lily. "Don't you know it's the fashion for young ladies to keep these books, and get all their friends to write therein their favourite authors, heroes, amusements, ideas of perfect happiness, &c.? Why, I keep one, of course."

"And I did, as you see, long ago, when

I was a young lady, and had friends to write in it; but it's one of the follies I've got over, and I gave the book to Mignonette to play with."

Guy opened the book, and saw one page written by his mother, one filled by Bertie's scrawly boyish caligraphy, and another by Kitty's own school-girlish handwriting.

"Come, Cousin Guy, we'll make a martyr of you, as you dared to pry into our mysteries. Write your confessions immediately."

"Don't trouble him, Lily: they will be lost to the world; I've given up my confession book and mean to hide it away for ever—I only keep it for the sake of one handwriting."

But Kitty's voice was drowned, and Guy was teased and coaxed until he wrote a farrago of nonsense that elicited a great many "Oh, how sillys" from Lily, who was looking over his shoulder.

"Now for the motto—your favourite motto, Guy?"

Guy thought a moment, and then he wrote—

"*Loyal je serai durant ma vie.*"

"Is that your favourite, really?"

"Yes, really; it is the refrain of a little song I heard sung once, long ago—before my mother died."

His face grew very grave and quiet. They thought he was thinking of his dead mother.

"Why, Miss Lorton sings that song," lisped Mignonette: "'Little bird, little bird——'" and she began singing in her baby voice.

They all laughed except Kitty.

"Come, Mignonette, the flowers are done; we must be gone."

And she marched Mignonette, confession book in hand, out of the room, in a sober, governessified way, and nobody saw her flushed cheeks and curling lips except Guy, and he noted them with sorrowful surprise, and bewilderment as to their cause. Was she offended with him, or jealous of the way in which he and Lily went on together? It was surely not possible, after all he had said and done, that she could misunderstand him so; she could not think that he had changed since that day—such a little while ago—when he had asked her to be his wife? He resolved that when she appeared again he would let her see plainly that he loved

her as well as ever, and then — and then——

The rest of his reflections faded away into a mist of uncertainty; but the effect of them was, to make him accept Mrs. Hoare's pressing invitation to appear at her "drum," and to remain to dinner and spend the evening with them.

"They would be quite alone, for a wonder; had no engagement of any sort, and would be so glad if Guy would stay and share their unusual solitude."

And he promised he would; with an *arrière pensée*—the hope of speaking a word to Kitty alone.

And Kitty, the instant the drawing-room door closed after her, regardless of the pain to her sprained ankle—which had not quite recovered—rushed up the stairs at a rate that amazed her little pupils, and taking the unfortunate confession book almost abruptly from little Mignonette's hand, left them to go into the schoolroom alone; then limping up another flight of stairs, went into her own small room and banged-to the door, locked it, and leant against it, breathless with haste and anger. No longer under any restraint, she gave

way to a perfect storm of passion; she raged up and down the room like a little fury, she flung the book down on the ground and trampled on it, looking at it with a face distorted and livid with rage.

It was the climax of Guy's many offences—the writing of that motto. How dared he remind her of that time? How dared he, who was so false, take that motto for his own?

Loyal? *He* loyal! Even in writing it he had tried to cheat and deceive her, by pretending that it was the remembrance of her song that made it dear to him. He didn't know that she knew all about him this time—that she was no longer to be deluded. She laughed a bitter little laugh at that thought. Utterly unreasonable in her passion, she at one moment accused him of being incapable of loving, and the next of being desperately in love with the woman whom she had seen with him on the drag. She picked up the book she had thrown down and tore out the sheet on which Guy had written, crumpling it up in her hand and digging her fingers into it with as much energy as if it were Guy himself whom she was punishing; then

throwing it into the farthest corner of the room, burst into a storm of crying.

She stayed there for a long while. She and the children had their early dinner by themselves in the schoolroom when Mrs. Hoare had her parties, and to-day Kitty left them to have it alone. They came to her door several times, and each time she sent them away, telling them she had a headache. The slow hours dragged on; she heard the sound of carriages, and she knew that the guests were arriving, but still she did not move. How sad it was, she thought, to sit there alone and forgotten, while downstairs they were enjoying themselves. Then another voice at the door—Lily Ransford's this time.

"Kitty, where have you hidden yourself? Open the door — be quick — can't wait. Come down directly, we are all wanting you."

"I can't come; please tell Mrs. Hoare, and ask her to excuse me—I have a headache."

"Nonsense, I know it's all an excuse. Come down directly, and don't be frightened. I'll take you under *my* wing. You silly Kitty, why don't you open the

door? Well, I can't wait," and then the sound of retreating footsteps, and then—stillness and solitude.

It grew quite late; the sun was losing some of its power, when Kitty rose up and went slowly to the glass. Her pupils would be coming up and wanting their tea—she must go to them; so she smoothed her hair and bathed her face and turned to leave the room; but at the door she paused, hesitated, and then, very slowly, went and picked up the piece of paper she had torn out of her book.

She held it in her hand and looked at it very wistfully. It was so torn and crumpled that most of it was illegible; but one small piece had almost escaped the general destruction; one line stood out clearly before her eyes in the bold, firm writing—

"Loyal je serai durant ma vie.
GUY LAWRENCE."

His signature. She looked at it so long that her heart grew weak. She could not destroy that. She tore it off from the rest, and folding it up, put it away and locked it up safely in a small carved ivory box where some precious relics and keepsakes, that to ordinary eyes looked very much like rubbish, were stored, and then care-

fully destroying the remainder of the leaf, and hiding the torn book, unlocked the door and went her way to the schoolroom.

Meanwhile Guy Lawrence had been fidgeting about in his cousin's drawing-room, mentally wishing all the ladies, old and young, at Jericho, and by his experience generally endorsing the truth of Lily Ransford's statement, that kettledrums were a newly-invented form of martyrdom.

Where was Kitty? He heard the message sent up to her, and the answer thereto conveyed in an audible whisper from Lily to Mrs. Hoare. He heard his cousin express surprise, almost annoyance at it; and he wondered—wondered very much—whether he was the cause of it.

Everything must have an end—even a kettledrum; and with gloomy satisfaction Guy watched the guests depart. Then came dinner—but no Kitty. He supposed that she never appeared at that meal, as no surprise was expressed at her absence. Surely she would be in the drawing-room afterwards? He hurried up as soon as he could, and found Mrs. Hoare and Lily seated in low chairs close to the open window, and the children running about in

and out of the balcony; but the one he sought was not there.

He joined them, and at last he spoke of her; wondering at himself half angrily for finding it so hard to mention her name carelessly.

"What has become of Miss Lorton? We have not seen her since she arranged the flowers."

"I don't know, I'm sure, where she is. I think it was rather too bad of her, when she knew I depended on her to help with the music, to make an excuse and——"

"Clara, you mustn't be hard on her; she hates coming down when there are a lot of people here, you know," said Lily.

"Well, where is she now? We can't sing those duets without her—why doesn't she come now?"

"I'll go and fetch her," said Lily, good-naturedly, rising from her easy-chair.

"No, you went once — you shan't go again. Send one of the children."

"No; let me go, Clara;" and before her sister could stop her, she was away.

Her kind heart made her sorry for the poor little lonely, forlorn creature. She found her sitting in the dreary room,

crouched up on the window-seat, staring out with sad, aching eyes into the twilight.

Kitty was feeling as if the loneliness, and the misery she was suffering were nearly driving her crazy, and she yielded to Lily's persuasions and came down with her—but she paused on the landing.

"Lily, my hair is rough, and my dress—I—I feel so shabby beside you," and she glanced from herself to Lily in her pretty, airy, floating demi-toilette.

"Oh no, you're all right; you look nice in anything—come along."

Kitty smiled wearily. She felt as if she almost loved the bright, happy girl who in the midst of gaiety and happiness found time to think of her; as if she could have flung her arms round her neck and thanked her for her kindness. But she was growing strangely quiet and proud and self-contained, and she said not a word—only walked in demurely by Lily's side, and tried not to blink at the sudden glare of light—tried not to look as confused and miserable as she felt.

She never knew how the evening passed. It was a long one both to her and to Guy. She played accompaniments, sang duets,

and made herself generally useful; till finding she was no longer wanted, and no one was likely to notice her, she crept away into the balcony by herself.

And Guy tried to talk and to seem as usual, but all the while he was watching her, and wondering about her; and when he saw her go out there alone, he waited for a few moments and then followed her.

"You seem to avoid me to-night," he said, as he stood by her side; "have I offended you?"

"Offended me?" she answered, coldly; "what reason have you had for thinking so?"

"Your distant manner—you scarcely answer me; when I asked you to sing, you refused."

"That is a privilege I still retain with my employer's guests. Mr. Lawrence, I have not quite given up all freedom of thought and action."

And with a disdainful little toss of her head, she turned and re-entered the room; and when he, after a few minutes, followed her, she had left it.

END OF VOL. II.

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